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THE NEW YORKER

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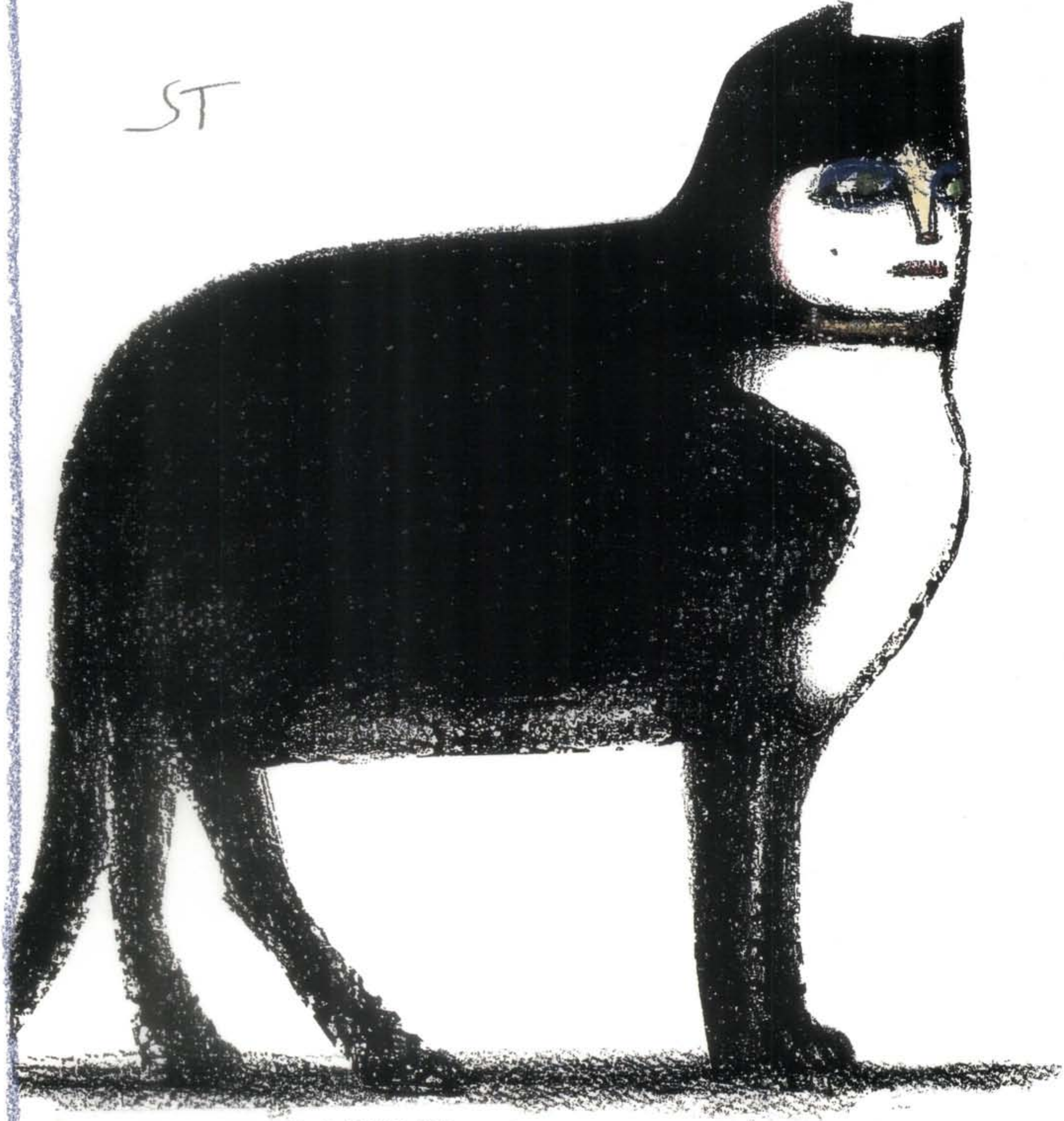

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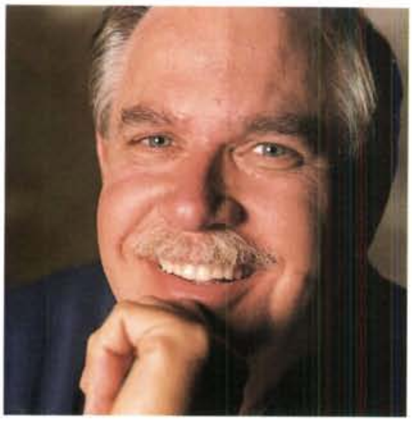

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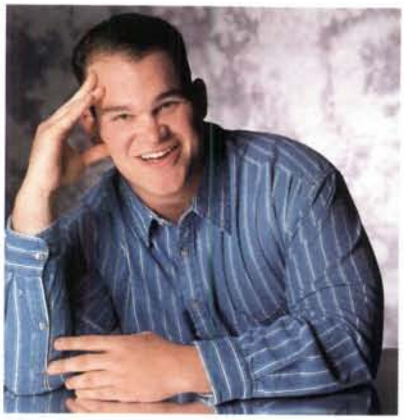

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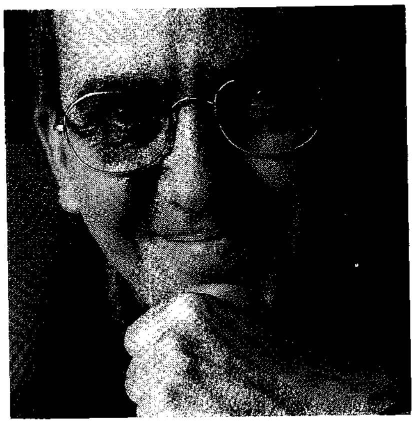

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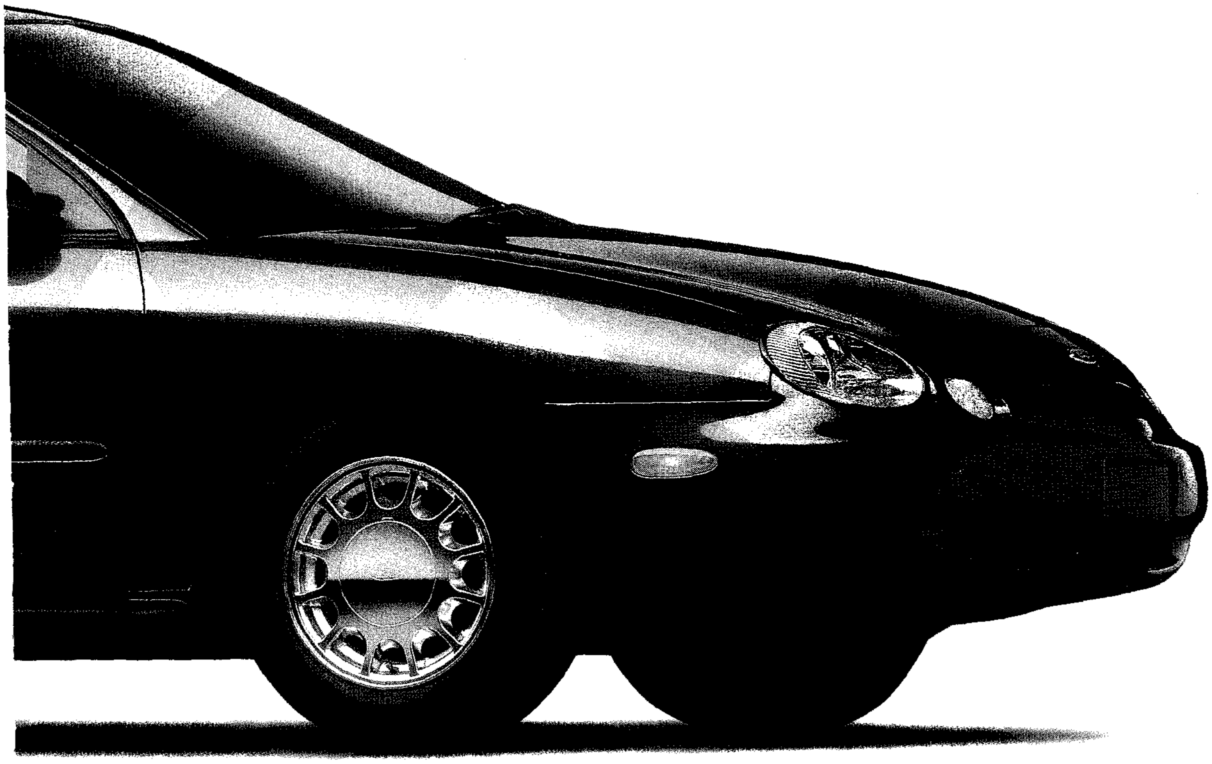

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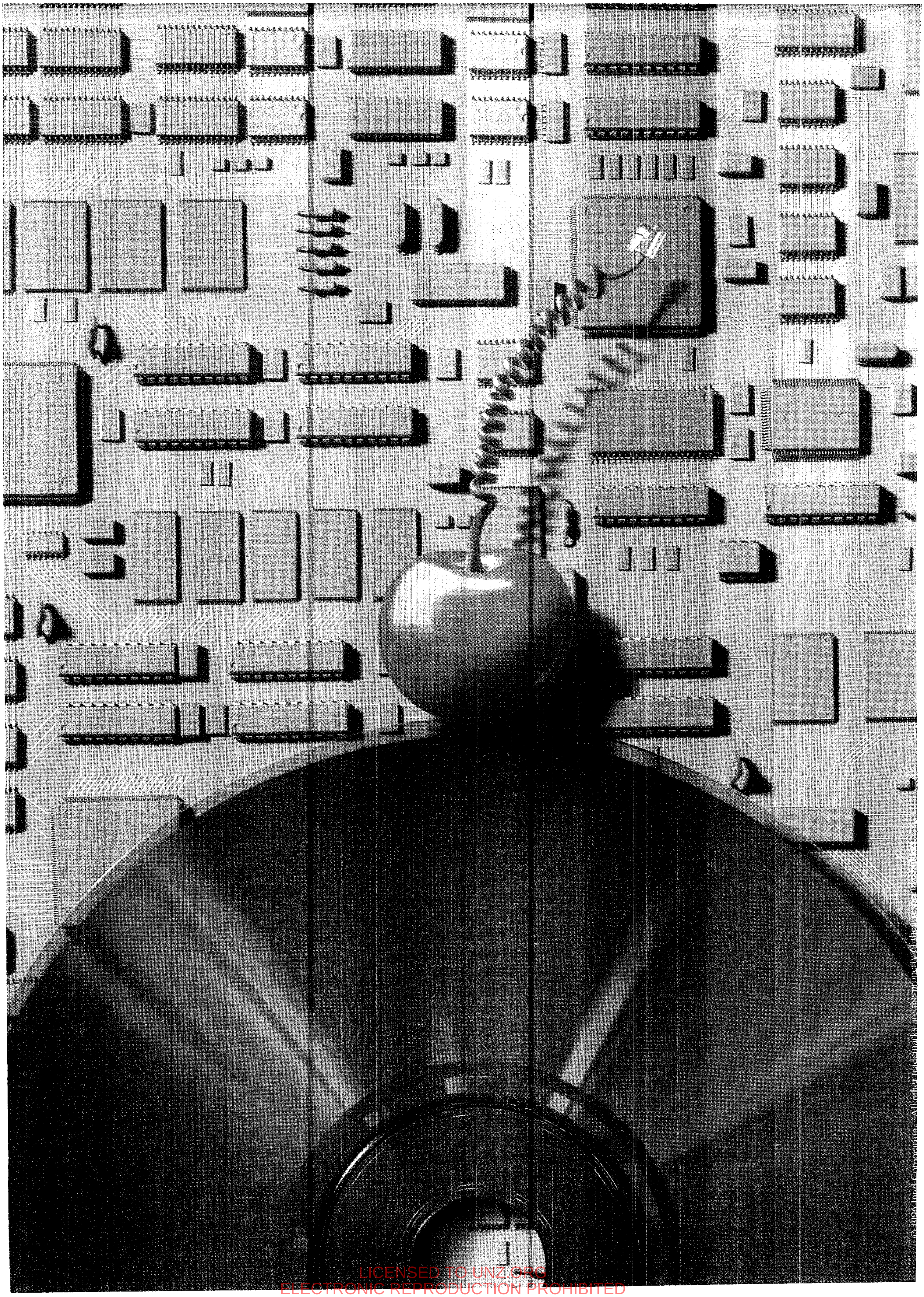

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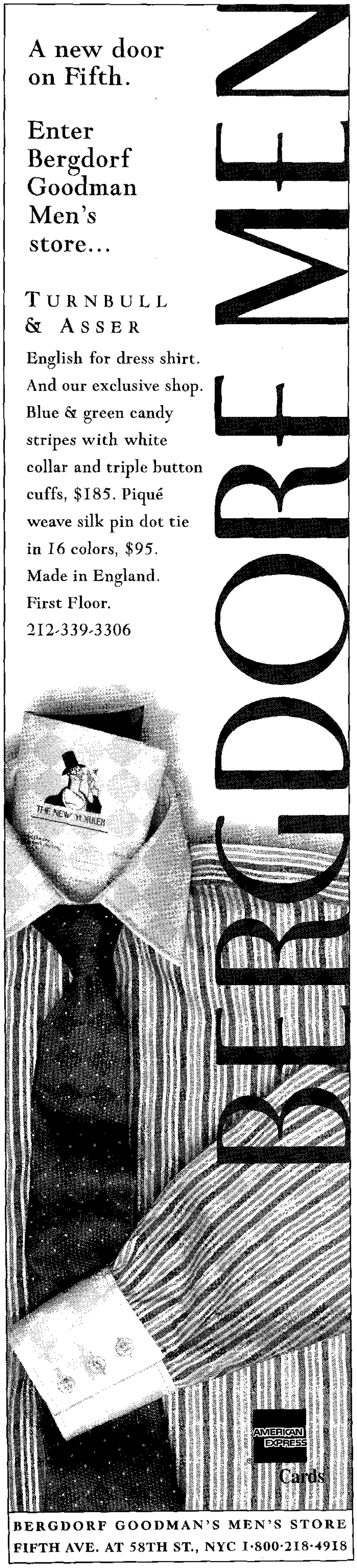

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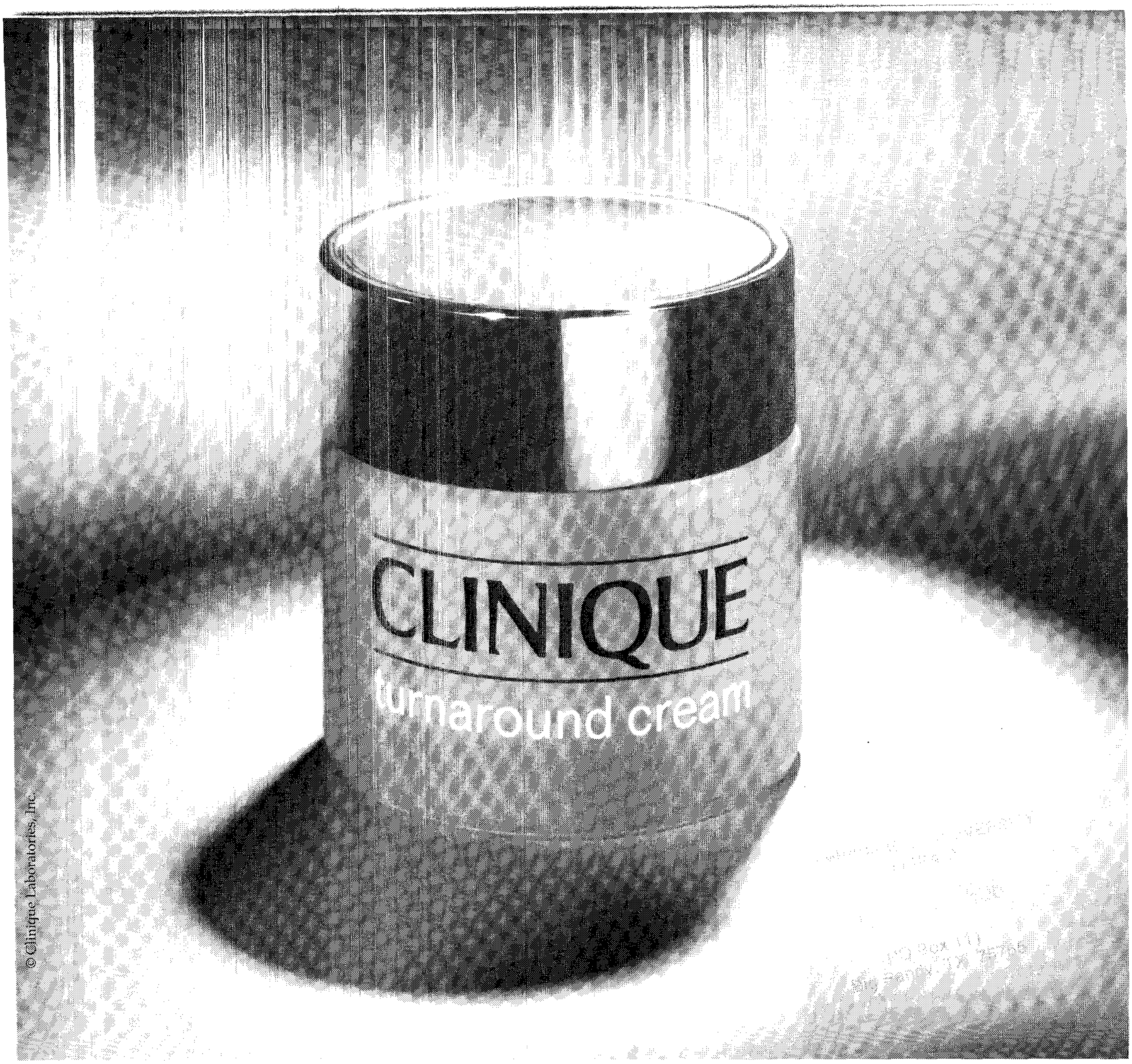
THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028-792X), published weekly (except for six combined issues: the last week of February and the first week of March, the last week of April and the first week of May, the last week of June and the first week of July, the last week of August and the first week of September, the last two weeks of October, and the last two weeks of December) by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc., 20 W. 43rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10036. Vol. LXXII, No. 35, November 18, 1996. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. Authorized as second-class mail by the Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada, and for payment of postage in cash. Canadian Publication Mail Sales Product Agreement No.190969. Canadian goods-and-services-tax registration number R123242885. Registered as a newspaper at the British Post Office. Subscription rates: In U.S. and possessions, one year, $39.95; two years, $72.00. In Canada, one year, $83.00 (includes G.S.T.). In Germany, one year, DM290. Mail orders to: IP Internationale Presse, Distribution & Marketing GmbH, Waldstr. 70, D-63128 Dietzenbach, Germany. Other foreign subscriptions, one year, $91.00, payable in advance.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The New Yorker, Box 56447, Boulder, Colorado 80322. PRINTED IN U.S.A.



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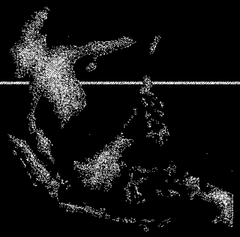

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COMMENT

BUT IS IT GOOD FOR THE NEWS?

Election returns N.B.A.-style, and vice versa.

IF you follow Presidential campaigns and you are over the age of twelve, you know that the punditorially correct answer to the standard Election Eve question "What should we be looking for tomorrow night?" is "Jim, if it's close in Indiana, it'll be a long night for the Republicans."

This is because Indiana, a state that (among, no doubt, many other distinctions) has two time zones, (a) usually goes solidly Republican in Presidential elections and (b) closes its polls at 6 P.M. local time, which means from a New York perspective that they close at 6 P.M. in some counties and 7 P.M. in others—a straddle that provides a convenient lead-in for Election Night television coverage. Viewers who tuned in last Tuesday night just after seven o'clock Eastern time were thus treated, on most channels, to a network anchor announcing, with a solemn wag of the head, that Indiana was "too close to call."

An election whose outcome has been widely regarded as a foregone conclusion for weeks highlights rather nicely the theatrical nature of electoral journalism. The anchors who couldn't tell us something they said they didn't know, which was how Indiana was going to go, also couldn't tell us something they did know (but couldn't tell us they knew), which was how the entire election was going to go. They knew how the entire election was going to go the same way they knew at nine o'clock, the minute the polls closed in New York, how New York had gone (and, for that matter, how upstate suburban Catholic soccer moms had gone): by means of exit polling done earlier in the day. Some networks continued to post the changing vote tallies as the evening went along, but this was just a bit of newsroom semiotics. Most of the "projections" were based on information that was essentially independent of the actual reported results.

Is that information news? In an election year, television networks conduct opinion polls and announce the results all the time, and these results are considered news; no one would dream of withholding them out of fear of influencing voter behavior. But Election Night protocol requires journalistic abstention until the state in question has closed its voting booths, much as laws in certain states (Indiana, for example) prohibit the sale of liquor during voting hours.

The official reason for this abstemiousness is the civic concern that projecting the winner of the Presidential contest too early might, by depressing turnout, warp the results in local races. This problem (if it is a problem, and there is lit-

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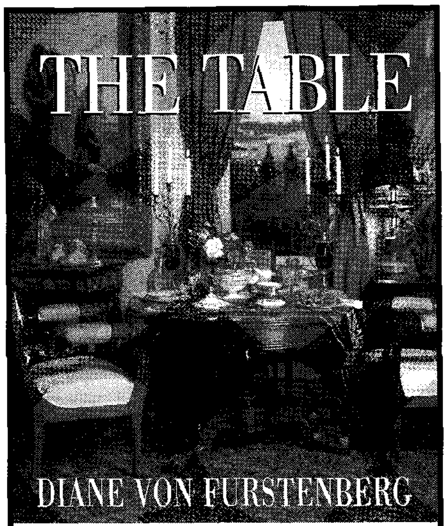

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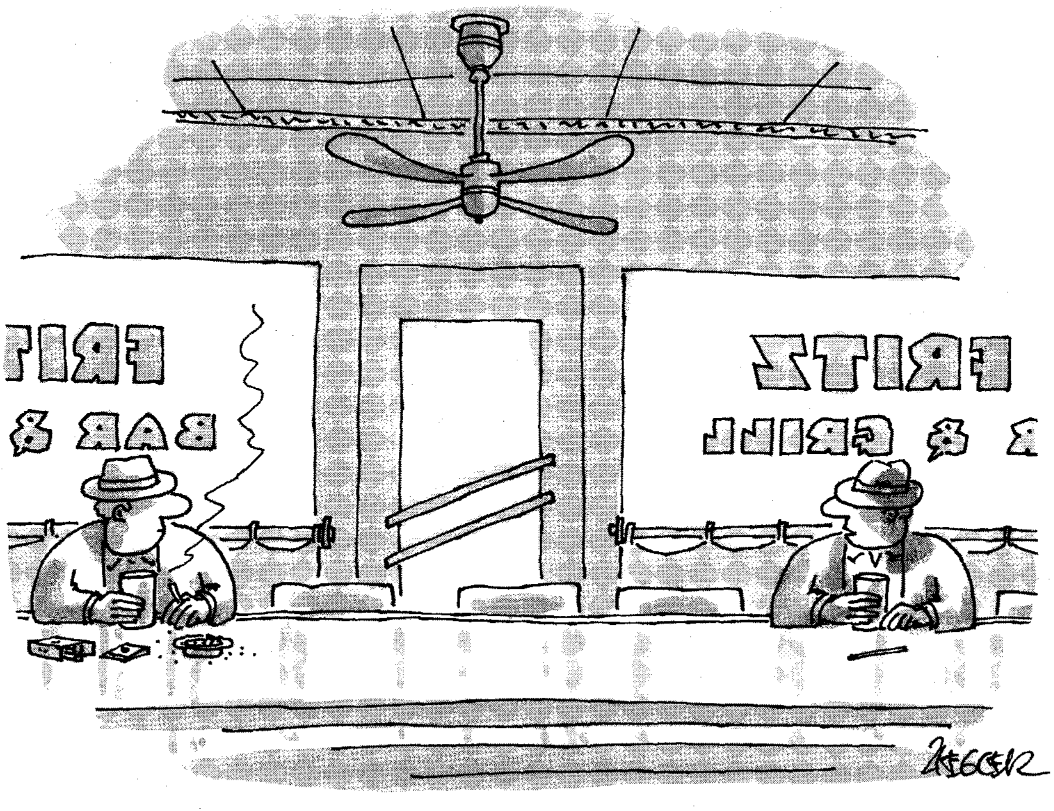


"I just did a huge one in my diaper."

tle empirical evidence to suggest that it is) has been solved halfway. The networks refrain from projecting the winner in each state until the voting is over in that state, but they can hardly avoid toting up the electoral votes as the projections accumulate, and this year this meant calling the election for President Clinton when Californians still had two hours left to boogie on down to the polling place and exercise their God-given franchise.

Besides voter turnout, the nets have another, less high-minded Election Night concern—viewer tuneout. The worry is that viewers who learn at seven o'clock that it's all over will hit the remote and start cruising for "Seinfeld" reruns. (Or, conceivably, turn their sets off and go back to reading their Truman biographies.) It is important to the drama of Election Night coverage to treat the race as a race, with the Electoral College scoreboard constantly changing. On Election Night, even more than on all other nights, news is covered like sports.

Is there a difference? This question is the heart of a lawsuit now before a federal appeals court. The complainant is the National Basketball Association, which seeks to enjoin Motorola and a company called STATS, Inc., from providing customers with minute-by-minute updates of the scores of basketball games. The customers are folks who have equipped themselves with two-hundred-dollar pagers that, at the push of a button, give the current score and a few other bits of information (ball possession, time remaining) of any game they choose. (The statistics are provided by couch potatoes hired to monitor local broadcasts. Nice work if you can get it.) The company does not pay the N.B.A.

NBC, which paid three-quarters of a billion dollars for the right to broadcast N.B.A. games through the 1997-98 season, has filed a brief on behalf of the N.B.A. Other news organizations, including the *Times* and the Associated Press, have filed briefs for the defendants, claiming that the running score of a game is information in the public realm—in a word, news. The N.B.A. argues that until the game is over even the feeblest representation of it is its own exclusive property as a privately owned entertainment enterprise.

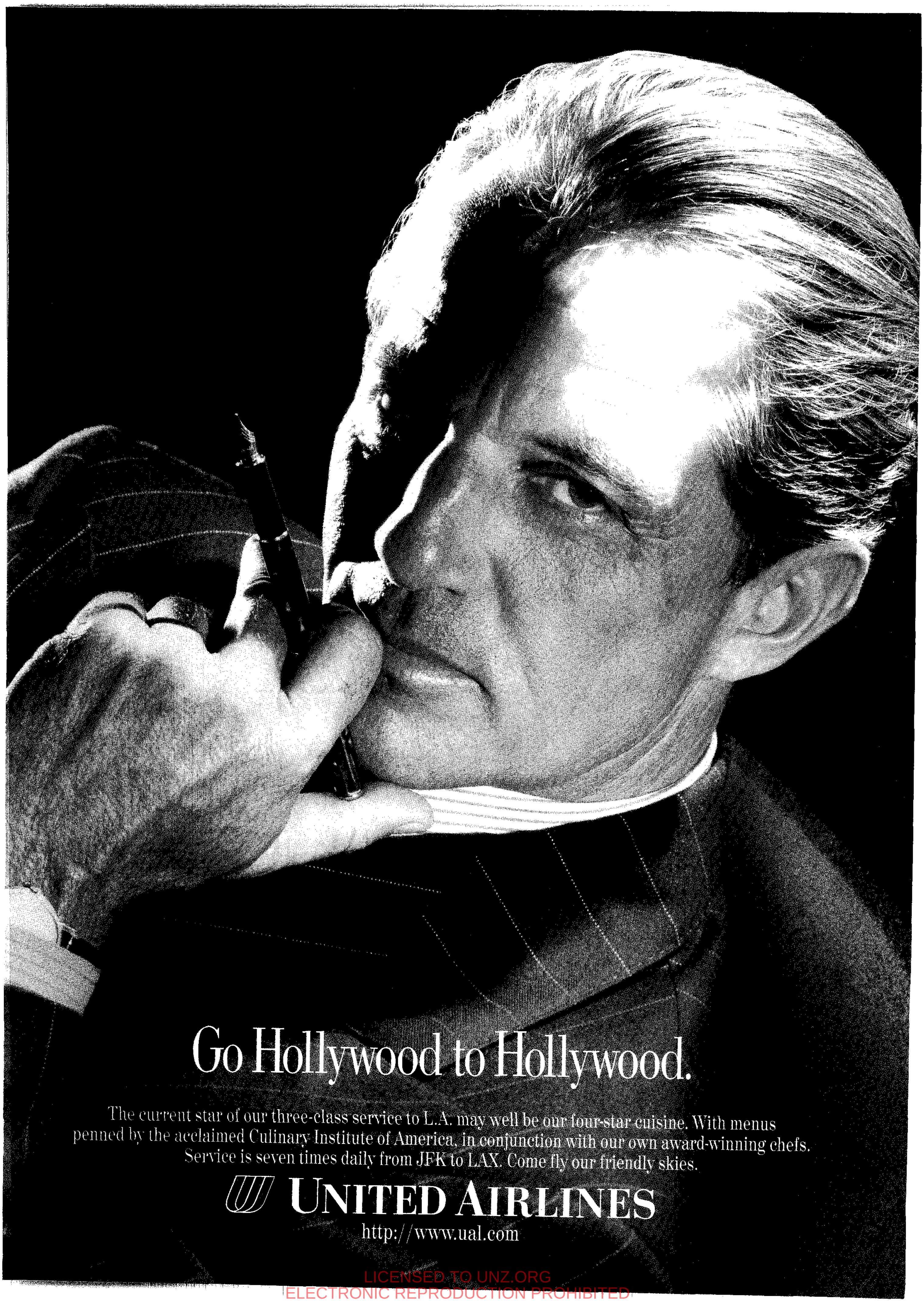
The N.B.A. is generally credited with having a highly aggressive and successful marketing strategy, but in this case it is possibly killing the goose. Almost every news organization in America gives professional basketball, and every other big-money sport, free publicity daily by treating sports (which are indeed privately owned entertainments) as news. Journalists who cover sports are not called reviewers; they're called reporters. This is a public-relations boon enjoyed by no other business, and it seems reckless for the N.B.A. to jeopardize it so that some Knicks fan trapped on a bus can't find out who's winning.

The interesting question, of course, is why anyone would *want* to pay two hundred dollars to find out that it's 82–80 with three minutes left in the third. If he waits an hour, he'll get the only score that matters, which is the final score. But that fan is just like the person who loves to follow political campaigns. All of us could have waited to tune in until eleven o'clock last Tuesday and spared ourselves the hokey suspense of the coverage. But what would have been the point of handicapping the race for months and then missing the fun of watching the horses charge across the line?

The phrase the N.B.A. uses for the practice it wants to enjoin is "the transmission of real-time data." This is a tough practice to enjoin, because human beings happen to be obsessed with real-time data. We don't want to know just the outcome. We want life to be a contest in which the outcome is always in doubt, even when it isn't. Two nights after the election, Ted Koppel was the guest on "Larry King Live." T.J. from San Francisco called to complain that ABC had declared Clinton the winner while he, T.J., was still standing in line to vote. Mr. Koppel, who is one of the most intelligent and articulate journalists on television, screwed on his most intelligent and articulate face, looked straight into the camera, and explained, "We're in the business of telling you what we know, not holding it back. Now, once the President is elected—in other words, once Bill Clinton had his two hundred and seventy electoral votes, and he had those long before the polls closed in California—you really don't want to know? You want us to keep that secret from you?"

"Yes," said T.J. "We do."

—Louis Menand



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Even if it proves to be true that sibling birth order plays some role in history, the latest proponent of this notion, Frank Sulloway, will hardly "join the pantheon of thinkers . . . whose work has radically and forever changed the way we look at ourselves and the world," as one eminent scientist said to Robert S. Boynton in "The Birth of an Idea" (October 7th). Statistical proof is not sufficient to make a grand theory broadly influential. In attempting to explain the wellsprings of nature, man, and society, thinkers like Marx, Freud, and Max Weber created systems of ideas that left a place for human agency and thus were ripe to be taken up by the movers and shakers of the world. Marxists could advance the revolution. Freudians could liberate themselves and others. And Weber purported to explain how people were driven to prosper by the seemingly static doctrine of predestination. By contrast, a theory that classifies our personalities according to birth order sits there like a lump of clay, completely inert. It has been quite obvious for a long time that some people tend to favor authority and others are rebellious. What difference does it make that they can be classified as firstborns and laterborns?

Ken I. Kersch
Ithaca, N.Y.

Frank Sulloway's scheme works at the level of natural selection only if behavior has a major genetic component and if one postulates the following rather elaborate scenario: some of us are, for genetic reasons, better than others at garnering and holding on to resources if we happen to be firstborns, and others of us are better at taking advantage of new opportunities if we happen to be laterborns. There would be selection for this genetic heterogeneity over time, meaning that in each generation "expert" firstborns and "expert" laterborns would appear, but they would be accompanied by an unavoidable complement of inept firstborns and inept laterborns. By concentrating on prominent people, Sulloway has found the experts and ignored the inept. Perhaps this truly Darwinian mechanism is operating in our species, but Sulloway's statistical surveys are a long way from demonstrating it.

Christopher Wills
Professor of Biology
University of California, San Diego
San Diego, Calif.

ENCORE

Lillian Ross did a brilliant job of capturing the intense and often quirky production process that was required to create the second annual "VH1 Fashion Awards" (The Talk of the Town, November 4th). But we'd like to clarify three facts that seem to have got lost in the commotion. Though our outstanding host, Heather Locklear, did ask for three tickets to "Rent," she was compensated in a manner commensurate with what is offered any host of a major awards show. Gianni Versace did not, in the end, present any awards, but his contributions, particularly in creating the award statuette and the runway performance, were invaluable. Also, Carlyne Cerf is a well-regarded fashion stylist who was retained to oversee the look of the performers in the runway segments; she did not function as anyone's assistant.

Lauren Zalaznick
Executive Producer, "VH1 Fashion Awards"
New York City

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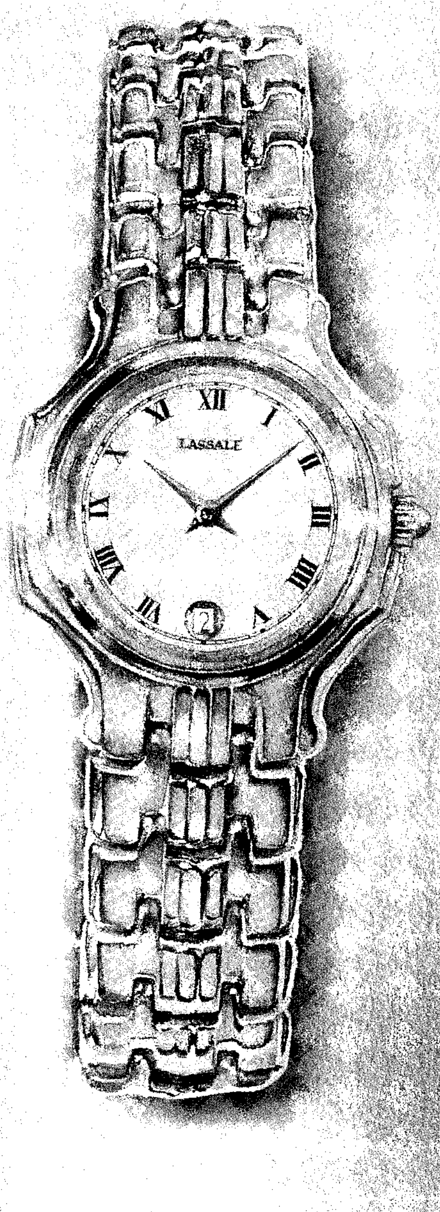

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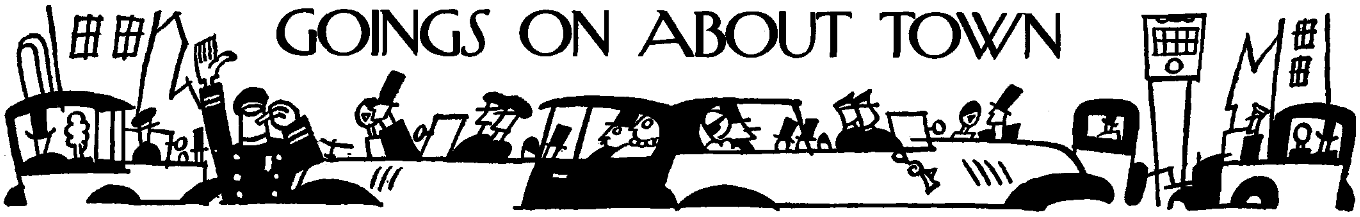


THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Beat: A Subway Cop's Comedy—John DiResta, N.Y.C. transit policeman and stand-up comic, files a report from his subterranean workplace. In previews. (Kaufman, 534 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

A Brief History of White Music—A comic revue by Dee Dee Thomas and David Tweedy, in which an all-black cast interprets the music of Sonny and Cher, the Beach Boys, the Beatles, and other honkies. In previews. (Village Gate, 240 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

Chicago—John Kander and Fred Ebb's 1975 musical version of Maureen Dallas Watkins's 1926 play, starring Bebe Neuwirth, Ann Reinking, Joel Grey, and James Naughton. Directed by Walter Bobbie. In previews. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

The Entertainer—Brian Murray and Jean Stapleton lead the cast in the Classic Stage Company's revival of John Osborne's drama about a failed vaudeville performer. Opens Nov. 13 at 7:30. (136 E. 13th St. 677-4210.)

God Said, "Ha!"—In her new one-woman show, the comic Julia Sweeney gives an account of the year her life seemed too good to be true—because it was. In previews through Nov. 18. Opens Nov. 19 at 6:45. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Golden Child—The latest from the pen of David Henry Hwang, a drama set in China in 1918. Directed by James Lapine. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III—The New York Shakespeare Festival continues with Karen Coonrod's staging of the trilogy, which will run in repertory as "Part 1: The Edged Sword" and "Part 2: Black Storm." In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St., 260-2400.)

Juan Darién: A Carnival Mass—Julie Taymor and Elliot Goldenthal's 1988 play, based on a mystical short story by the Uruguayan author Horacio Quirogà, incorporates music, puppetry, masks, and dance. Directed by Ms. Taymor. In previews. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

The Pirates of Penzance—A Village Light Opera Group production of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. Nov. 15 at 8 and Nov. 17 at 2. Continues through Nov. 24. (Fashion Institute of Technology, 227 W. 27th St. 279-4200.)

Present Laughter—Frank Langella portrays the matinée idol Garry Essendine in Noël Coward's 1946 comedy. Directed by Scott Elliot. In previews through Nov. 17. Opens Nov. 18 at 6:45. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

The Red Devil Battery Sign—Elizabeth Ashley and James Victor star in Tennessee Williams's 1975 drama, set in Dallas after the assassination of President Kennedy. Opens Nov. 13 at 8. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
17	18	19	13	14	15	16

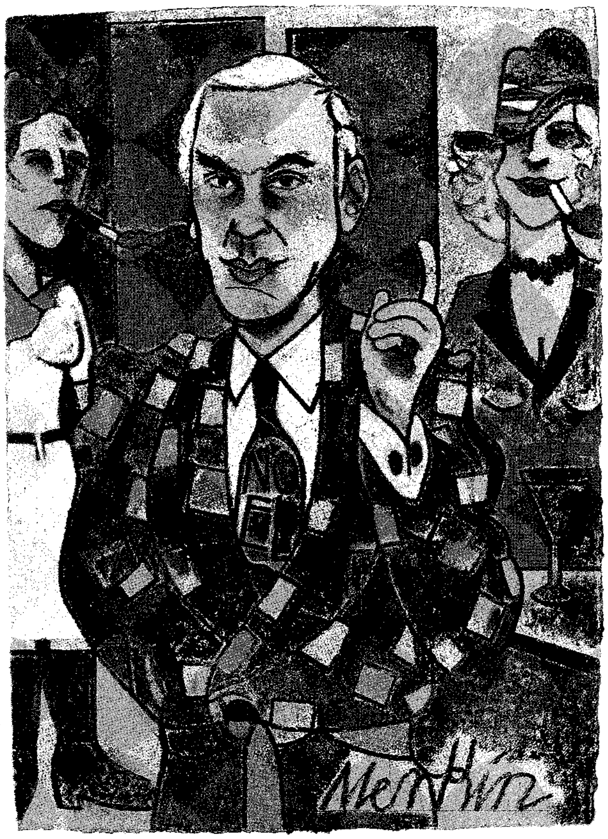
The Rehearsal—The Roundabout Theatre Company presents Roger Rees, David Threlfall, and Frances Conroy in Jeremy Sams's new translation of Jean Anouilh's drama. Directed by Nicholas Martin. In previews. (Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

A Soldier's Play—Charles Fuller's 1982 drama, about a murder on a Southern military base during the Second World War. Presented by the Valiant Theatre Company. In previews through Nov. 17. Opens Nov. 19 at 8. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

The Springhill Singing Disaster—Karen Trott plays all the roles, and all the guitars, in her comedy about the tribulations of a calamity-ridden folksinger, which was seen last season at Playwrights Horizons. Directed by Lonny Price. In previews. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Tooth of Crime (Second Dance)—Sam Shepard's new version of his 1972 drama about about a rock star past his prime, starring Vincent D'Onofrio and with new music by T Bone Burnett. A co-production of Second Stage and the Signature Theatre Company. Previews begin Nov. 15. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

The Waste Land—A stage version of T. S. Eliot's poem, performed by Fiona Shaw and directed by Deborah Warner. In previews Nov. 14-16. Opens Nov. 17 at 6:30 and continues through Dec. 15. (Liberty, 234 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)



Allison Janney, Frank Langella, and Caroline Seymour, in Noël Coward's "Present Laughter."

OPENED RECENTLY

The Blues Are Running—Michael Cristofer's new play, in which mistaken identity results in murder, revolves around the intertwined circumstances of three unacquainted couples. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Born to Sing!—This sequel to the long-running gospel musical "Mama, I Want to Sing!" has a negligible plot and some second-rate acting, but the point is the music, and the music is glorious. You couldn't find a better introduction to gospel without going to church. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 505-0700.)

Cakewalk—Linda Lavin has the lead opposite Michael Knight in Peter Feibleman's autobiographical drama about his relationship with Lillian Hellman. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

The Cocoanuts—The American Jewish Theatre's revival of the Irving Berlin–George S. Kaufman musical that starred the Marx Brothers in 1925. The songs are pleasant enough, but it's the laugh-out-loud comedy that really scores. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Cymbeline—Shakespeare's late play unreels like a Movie of the Week: it has young love misunderstood, a lady wronged, a kidnapping, political intrigue, and a happy ending, all put together with tricks the playwright recycled from earlier, better works—a potion that mimics death, women dressed up as boys, mistaken identities. Familiar as all this stuff is, the Pearl Theatre Company's production is great fun, and Kathleen McNenny, as the wronged lady, and John Wylie (a Pearl stalwart), as her aged servant, are charming enough to make it matter. Directed, with an appropriate emphasis on humor, by Shepard Sobel. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

Demonology—Marisa Tomei and Rocco Sisto star in Kelly Stuart's new comedy, set in the future, about sabotage at a baby-formula plant. Directed by Jim Simpson. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Nov. 17.)

Family Values—A podiatrist (Joel Fabiani) has second thoughts after he dumps his wife (Ellen Evans) for a younger woman, in a comedy by the Canadian playwright Carl Ritchie. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 358-5174.)

Forbidden Broadway Strikes Back!—Gerard Alessandrini cuts a satirical swath through the Great White Way in a new edition of his musical parody. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

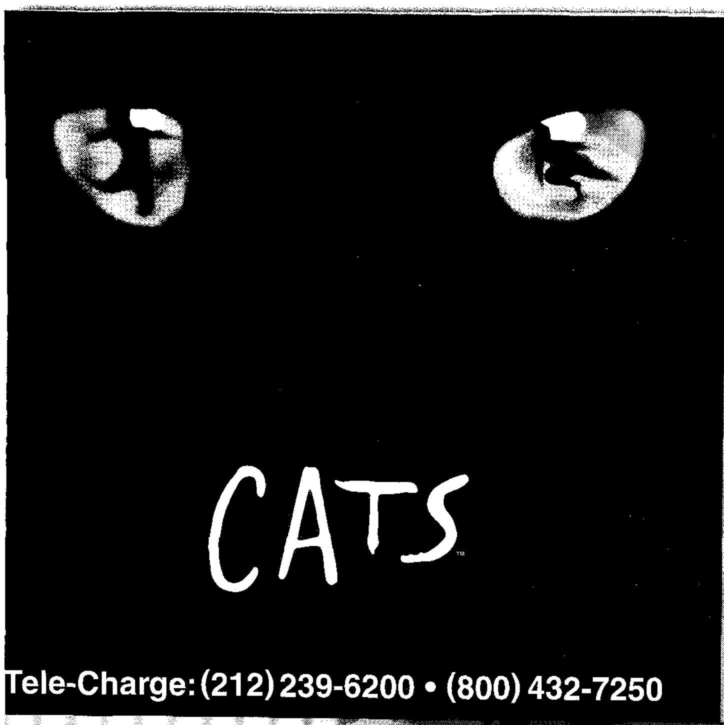
Full Gallop—The legendary, vividly eccentric fashion editor Diana Vreeland is the subject of Mary Louise Wilson and Mark Hampton's one-woman play, in which Wilson stars. Set in 1971, shortly after Vreeland was fired from *Vogue*, it's rich and resonant, with much to say about life that's worth hearing. A thoroughly satisfying evening in the theatre—very funny and very moving. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

The Gravity of Means—A new comedy by John Kolvenbach, on the subject of friendship. (MCC Theatre, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes Nov. 23.)

The Heather Woodbury Report; or, What Ever—The performance artist presents one episode of her one-woman, hundred-odd-character serial comedy every Wednesday through Dec. 18. (Surf Reality, 172 Allen St., between Stanton and Rivington Sts. 673-4182.)

Howard Crabtree's When Pigs Fly—The exuberant designer Howard Crabtree died in June, and this revue of witty, satiric songs (created with and written and directed by Mark Waldrop, and sung by a talented cast dressed in Crabtree's sequinned, feathered, mind-boggling

RICHARD MERKIN



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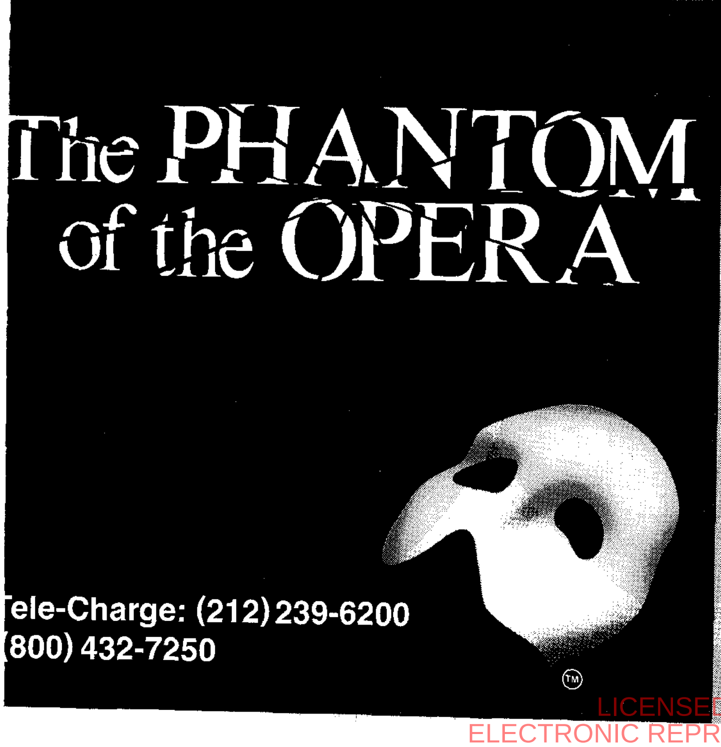
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costumes) is a fitting cap to his career. The songs purport to be parts of a larger show that keeps falling apart, leaving Howard (played by Michael West) wondering whether he should have become a chicken farmer. Clearly, chicken farming's loss was our gain. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change—In made-for-musical-theatre voices, the appealing cast of Joe DiPietro and Jimmy Roberts's crowd-pleasing revue about love and marriage sings songs examining made-for-musical-theatre issues. Couples in the audience may nudge each other happily as they guess the actors' lines before they're uttered. Directed by Joel Bishoff. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

The Importance of Being Earnest—This very pleasing and intimate production of Oscar Wilde's nonpareil comedy marks the designer Tony Walton's New York directorial début, and he has assembled an excellent cast for the occasion. First and foremost, there is Nancy Marchand as that glowering goddess Lady Bracknell; not far behind her are Eric Stoltz, Daniel Gerroll, Melissa Errico, Thomas Carson, Sloane Shelton, Schuyler Grant, and John Fiedler. An Irish Repertory Theatre production. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

It's a Slippery Slope—Spalding Gray has learned to ski, and he tells all about it in his new monologue, on Sundays and Mondays at the Vivian Beaumont. (Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Joe Turner's Come and Gone—August Wilson's powerful play, set among African-Americans in a Pittsburgh boarding house in 1911—a time when what it meant to be free and black in America was unclear—is about ties that bind and ties that are sundered, by blacks themselves and by racist whites. The play shows how an intimate, supportive group is shaken by betrayal and violence but sustained by several different kinds of faith. Arthur French, as a mojo man, and Mike Hodge and Peggy Alston, as the respectable boarding-house owners, all stake their turf compellingly; Wilson's achievement lies as much in showing how their competing visions can be reconciled as it does in demonstrating how the violence done to their little community can be withstood. The rest of the cast is also riveting, and Clinton Turner Davis's direction is both clear and funny. The New Federal Theatre Company produced. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 353-1176. Closes Nov. 17.)

Joseph Gabriel: Magic on Broadway—Mr. Gabriel has performed at the Las Vegas Flamingo Hilton for the past ten years, and his feats are certainly impressive: making his assistant's torso disappear; pulling a parrot from inside an egg hidden inside a lemon hidden inside a grapefruit; conjuring up a Checker cab onstage. But it's all too clear from the trappings of his act—dancers in polka-dotted boxer shorts, a sequinned Elvis—that he hasn't left Nevada behind. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Late Nite Catechism—Maripat Donovan, whose face seems to hold as many expressions as the Bible has parables, offers a commanding performance as the lone nun in charge of an adult catechism class, and the audience brings as much to the performance as the script does. It's hard to keep from laughing whether you're a believer or not, though you may face a reprimand or two in the process. (St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

Matty: An Evening with Christy Mathewson—Between 1911 and 1913, baseball great Christy Mathewson led the New York Giants to three pennant victories, and he also did quite a bit of writing, which Eddie Frierson has turned into a one-man show. Frierson exhibits plenty of energy (there's no shortage of yelling) in relating tales of such characters as manager John McGraw and Charley (Giant Jinx Killer) Faust. Unfortunately, he never fails to include the moral of a story. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The New Bozena—The latest clownings around by the red-nosed trio composed of David Costabile, Michael Dahlen, and Kevin Isola. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

Nine Armenians—Leslie Ayvazian's new work, a multigenerational family drama, was inspired by memories of her immigrant-scholar grandfather. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

1969 Terminal 1996—Joseph Chaikin and Susan Yankowitz have reworked their 1969 exploration of death, which was originally staged by the Open Theatre. Nov. 13-14 and Nov. 17 at 8:30 and Nov. 15-16 at 8:30 and 10:30. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

Old Wicked Songs—Jon Marans' well-written piece of sentimental sanctimony asks the question: Can a blocked, arrogant twenty-five-year-old pianist find wisdom under the tutelage of a suicidal singing teacher who survived the Holocaust? (The answer is yes.) The characters go through their changes neatly, but the audience arrives at the station long before the engine of the plot does. (Reviewed in our issue of 9/16/96.) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

O Solo Mio Festival—The New York Theatre Workshop's solo-performance festival this year features works by Emmett Foster and Dael Orlandersmith. (79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

The Queen of Bingo—A new comedy by Jeanne Michels and Phyllis Murphy, about a Friday night in the life of two middle-aged sisters who are inveterate low-stakes gamblers. (Greenwich House Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

Recreation—In Penn Jillette's new play, set in a Memphis strip club, a Mitty-like man lets his mind wander, and noirish comedy ensues. (Curican, 154 W. 29th St. 736-2533. Closes Nov. 17.)

The Santaland Diaries—Two one-acts, adapted by Joe Mantello from David Sedaris's book of stories, "Barrel Fever." Directed by Mr. Mantello. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

Sex and Longing—Christopher Durang's first new full-length play (and, boy, is it full-length: two hours and forty-five minutes) in ten years is, to profoundly understate the case, a major disappointment. Poor Sigourney Weaver plays

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a sex addict who finds God, and the stellar Dana Ivey plays the repressed, religiose wife of a senator; her performance is all that keeps the evening from being a total washout. (11/4/96) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200. Closes Nov. 17.)

SIGNATURE THEATRE COMPANY—The troupe's Sam Shepard season has begun with a pair of one-acts: "When the World Was Green (A Chef's Fable)," co-written with Joseph Chaikin, and "Chicago." Mr. Chaikin is the director. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

SKYLIGHT—The playwright David Hare's success and his social conscience are still at odds. This time, the inimitable Michael Gambon plays a successful entrepreneur, and the powerful, appealing Lia Williams is his beloved former mistress, who has given up the lush life to teach the underprivileged. Their differences are factored out as systematically as an algebraic equation. Like John Gunter's set—a well-appointed ramshackle flat in the fashionable but dowdy area of Northwest London—the play seems caught between naturalism and symbolism. (9/30/96) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

SOVREMENNIK THEATRE OF MOSCOW—The Russian troupe, in a limited engagement of Chekhov's "Three Sisters," Nov. 13 at 2 and 8, and Eugenia Ginzburg's "Into the Whirlwind," Nov. 15 at 8 and Nov. 16 at 2 and 8. Performances are in Russian, with simultaneous English translation. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

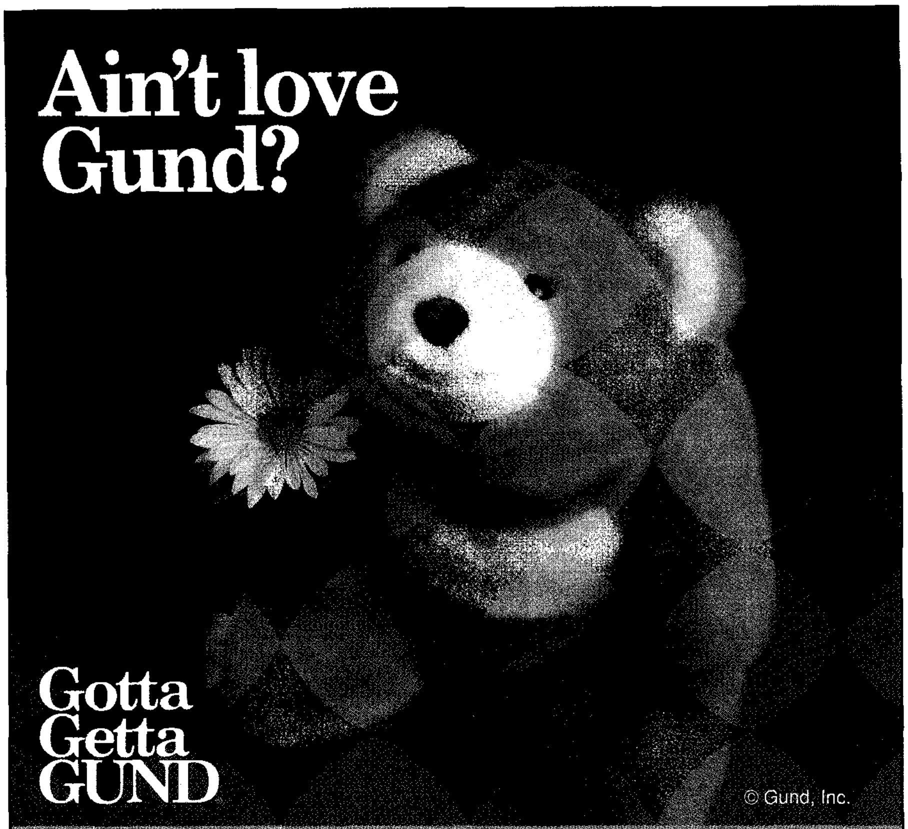
STREET SCENE—The Willow Cabin Theatre Company presents Elmer Rice's 1929 urban tragedy. (Theatre Row Theatre, 424 W. 42nd St. 886-1889. Closes Nov. 17.)

TAKING SIDES—Set in Berlin just after the Second World War, Ronald Harwood's play, part fact and part fiction, stars Daniel Massey as the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler and Ed Harris as an American Army officer who interrogates him about his alleged ties to the Nazis. (Furtwängler was cleared of all charges.) Harris's character, a tough-talking blowhard, is meant to symbolize the wrongness of unquestioned rightness, and Harwood's Furtwängler spouts a lot of blather about the relationship between art and politics. The play is little more than a pileup of pieties and platitudes; its approach to moral complexity is deeply shallow. (11/4/96) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

THIS IS OUR YOUTH—The New Group continues a winning streak of keenly rendered slice-of-life plays with a new one by Kenneth Lonergan, about the early-eighties lost generation, the stoned sons and daughters of New York City's newly rich. Under the direction of Mark Brokaw, all three actors—Mark Ruffalo, as a dejected nineteen-year-old who robs his father of fifteen thousand in cold cash, Josh Hamilton, as the drug-dealing friend who tries to help him put the loot to good use, and Missy Yager, as the anxiously insightful woman he yearns for—execute their roles with just the right understanding and sad charm. Lonergan's characters don't respect themselves any more than they do their parents; they already dread what they know they'll turn into, and you love them even though you know what they'll turn into, too. The meticulous set is by Allen Moyer. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Nov. 24.)

TOMORROWLAND—New Georges presents a new play by Neena Beber, a dark comedy about a woman who leaves academe for a job on a children's television show in Orlando. (46 Walker Street Theatre, 46 Walker St. 560-7387.)

THE WAITING ROOM—In Lisa Loomer's new play, three women of different eras—a Chinese woman with bound feet, a "hysterical" Victorian wife, and a modern woman with breast implants—meet in a doctor's office, and we see how their lives have been defined and limited, if not destroyed, by men. Although there's no news here, Loomer has also dramatized the way women participate in their own undoing, especially in the case of the Chinese woman, who is played touchingly by June Kyoko Lu. Veanne Cox and Chloe Webb are the other members of the trio; Byron Jennings, Lou Liberatore, and Michele Shay perform five small roles with crisp excellence. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874.)



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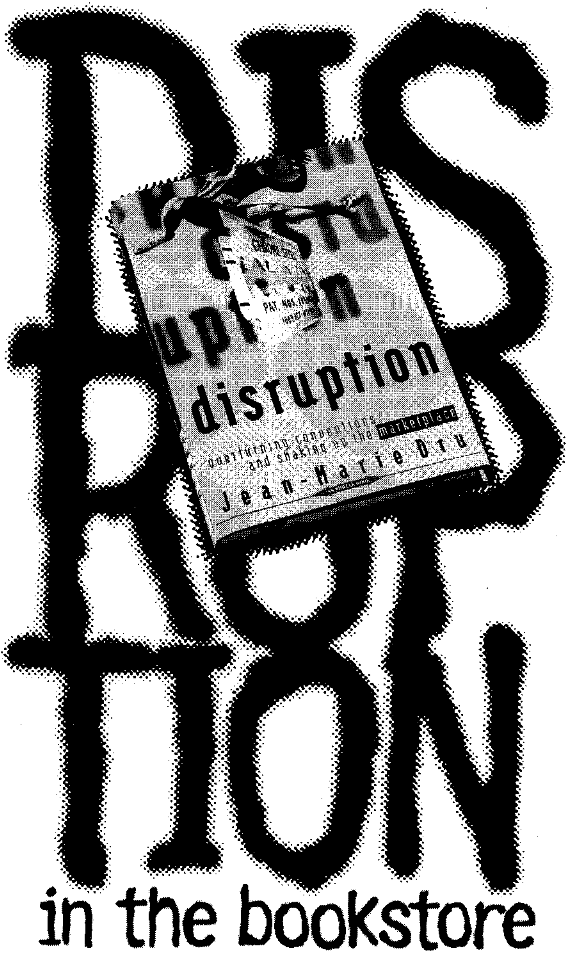

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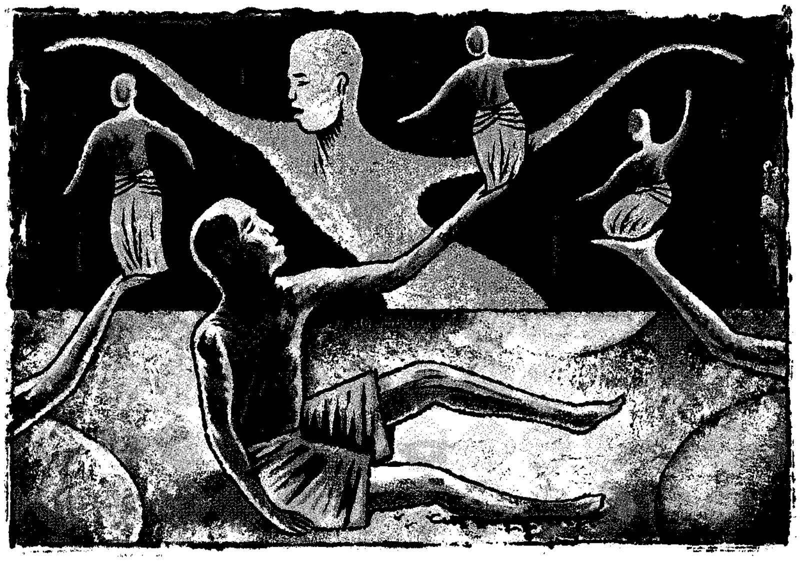

The butoh dance company Sankai Juku, in "Yuragi," at BAM.

DANCE

"BONES AND ASH: A GILDA STORY"—"You know I had a little change," the choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar said at a recent rehearsal. The little change occurred five months ago, when veterans of her company, Urban Bush Women, walked out and Zollar had to find new dancers two days before a performance. The former Bush Woman Maia Claire Garrison admits that the breakup wasn't amicable. "But," she adds, "the anger is different now—we've moved on. I'm going to the Joyce because I've always wanted to see 'Ash.' Only I was always *in* it." The full-length work requires performers (at present, three new Bush Women, two old ones, and seven guest artists) to dance, sing, and act as they tell the story of an escaped slave girl who learns the finer points of bloodletting at a New Orleans bordello. According to Toshi Reagon, the composer who contributed "the music stuff," the work is filled with "hos, lesbians, vampires, and heteros." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Nov. 12-16 at 8 and Nov. 17 at 2 and 7:30.)

"YURAGI"—Thanks in part to their slightly menacing appearance (powdery, bare-chested, bald), the five members of Sankai Juku have made the mysterious slow-motion vocabulary of butoh familiar to Western audiences—but no easier to explain. In this program, the men dance on a floor of white sand, moving among giant Lucite disks that are raised and lowered to various heights. In opposite corners of the stage, metal poles hold bowls aloft; each bowl partially conceals a white rabbit. The title refers both to continuously evolving shapes and to the perpetual motion of the body, and the shy aerial rabbits, according to choreographer Ushio Amagatsu, are meant to symbolize "a kind of upper place where the air is fresh." (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Nov. 12 at 7 and Nov. 14-16 at 8.)

"THE ARCHITECTURE OF SEEING"—The choreographer Patricia Hoffbauer and the writer George Emilio Sanchez collaborate on a trilingual multimedia work that satirizes the *National Geographic* approach to indigenous cultures with presentations of pseudofolkloric artifacts: dances and costumes, a living Noble Savage, a Latina talk-show hostess who can turn a casual interview into a citizenship exam. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Nov. 14-16 at 8 and Nov. 17 at 3.)

"MINE"—Sculptor Rona Pondick turns director in a collaboration with choreographer Sara Rudner, among others, on a work about primal needs: according to Rudner, the words "I want" are scribbled on the costumes and the outsized scenery, which includes typical Pondick installations (giant replicas of human ears, a twenty-three-foot bed and matching door frame, etc.). (Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway. 718-636-4100. Nov. 13-16 at 8.)

NEO LABOS DANCETHEATRE—Choreographer Michele Elliman presents two new works, "Psyche" and "The Flight." (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 924-0077. Nov. 13-15 at 8, Nov. 16 at 3 and 8, and Nov. 17 at 3.)

LIMON DANCE COMPANY—To kick off its fiftieth-anniversary season, the company performs works created by its namesake, José Limon: "La Malinche," "Orfeo," "The Moor's Pavane," and "A Choreographic Offering." (Queens Theatre in the Park, Flushing Meadow–Corona Park. 718-760-0064. Nov. 16 at 8 and Nov. 17 at 3.)

"FACE THE MUSIC AND DANCE"—Trumpeter Olu Dara and choreographer Dianne McIntyre collaborate on "Blues Rooms," a work in which both dancers and musicians slip into a birth-of-the-blues landscape of juke joints and back porches. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Nov. 14 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

SOUNDGARDEN—Like their buddies in Pearl Jam, Seattle's second-biggest band is coming off a record that represents striking growth—and attenuated sales. You might attribute this to maturity and better haircuts, or simply to the fact that (like Pearl Jam) the band has wandered off into its inevitably experimental, "Physical Graffiti" stage. But the Led Zeppelin comparison is certainly apt: Soundgarden still writes the most memorable, low-riding rock riffs of the nineties, and Chris Cornell is the best high-decibel howler since Robert Plant. Live, they make a mean and meaty noise. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Nov. 15-17 at 7:30.)

KATE & ANNA McGARRIGLE—At times, these exquisitely talented sisters sound more like products of the Appalachian Mountains than their native Laurentians, and it's precisely that kind of cultural cross-referencing that has given their music such timeless resonance over the past twenty years. Their latest release, "Matapedia," named after a river in Quebec, is typically evocative and poignant, and it features Anna's arresting "Goin' Back to Harlan," which Emmylou Harris introduced so neatly on her "Wrecking Ball" album. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Nov. 15 at 8.)

VIC CHESTNUTT—The fact that he uses a wheelchair may have earned him more media attention, but it's the riveting music of this unclassifiable singer-songwriter that's won him the admiration of his peers. On "Sweet Relief II—Gravity of the Situation," a motley crew including Madonna, Smashing Pumpkins, and Garbage all pay tribute to his work. (St. Ann's Church, 157 Montague St. Brooklyn. 718-858-2424. Nov. 15 at 8.)

ROBYN HITCHCOCK / BILLY BRAGG—Hitchcock's predilection for psychedelia has long made him the heir apparent to Syd Barrett's acid-king throne, but it's his knack for jangly pop melodies which rescues him from what would otherwise be offensively willful quirkiness. His performances are better than his recordings (which tend to sound as if they were recorded in the middle of a rain forest), and they're famous for their perfect distillation of British wit and weirdness. / Post-punk's premier socialist is an odd case: a shaky singer, a remedial guitarist, and an inveterate proselytizer (a typical medley consists of a few moldy union songs, an impromptu reading of Blake's "Jerusalem," and the "Internationale"). So what accounts for Bragg's unflagging popularity? It must have something to do with the way he weaves the theatre of politics in with the politics of the bedroom. The nineties have been rough on him, but Bragg remains a commanding onstage presence; his droll banter and heartfelt, often hilarious material prove that you can still win a few battles after losing the war. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 307-7171. Nov. 15 at 8.)

THE WHO—In the notes accompanying the 1994 boxed set "Thirty Years of Maximum R. & B.," Pete Townshend claimed, "I don't like The Who much." Right. Seeing as how (some twenty-seven years after the fact) he was able to turn "Tommy" into a Broadway money-spinner, it's really no surprise that this relentless ash-sifter, who's well on his way to becoming the Edmund Wilson of rock, should now be re-animating his second "opera," "Quadrophenia," which originally appeared in 1973. Unfortunately, the four-sided tale of England's mod generation must now be told without the explosive work of drummer Keith Moon, the one band member who did die before he got old. (Nassau Coliseum. 516-794-9300. Nov. 15 at 8. . . . ¶ Continental Airlines Arena, the Meadowlands. 201-935-3900. Nov. 19 at 8.)

ROBIN HOLCOMB—The Seattle-based singer-composer. (St. Ann's Church, Brooklyn. Nov. 16 at 8.)

"IN THE SPIRIT OF SWING"—Lionel Hampton, the man who brought the vibes into jazz way back when, is still swinging. No elder-statesman figurehead, he's still a driving and lyrical improviser and a never-say-die rabble-rouser. Saluting the grand old man will be Wynton Marsalis, Ruth Brown, Savion Glover, and "60 Minutes"

Having transformed a plant into a giraffe, Amy was ready to stick her neck out in boxing aerobics.

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correspondent Ed Bradley. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Nov. 18 at 7:30.)

The Heads—It's always fun to pick on David Byrne, but this ad-hoc band, featuring the three remaining members of the Talking Heads—Jerry Harrison, Tina Weymouth, and Chris Frantz—is incontrovertible proof that it was the bug-eyed hipster doofus who gave that group its bite. Since everyone but Byrne has gone on to become a successful record producer, you can't help but write this off as a vanity project—a notion supported by the combo's lackluster début, "No Talk, Just Head," which features a host of guest vocalists, including Debbie Harry, Michael Hutchence, and Concrete Blonde's Johnette Napolitano, who is also touring with the band. Hope for a bunch of Tom Tom Club tunes. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 353-1600. Nov. 18 at 8.)

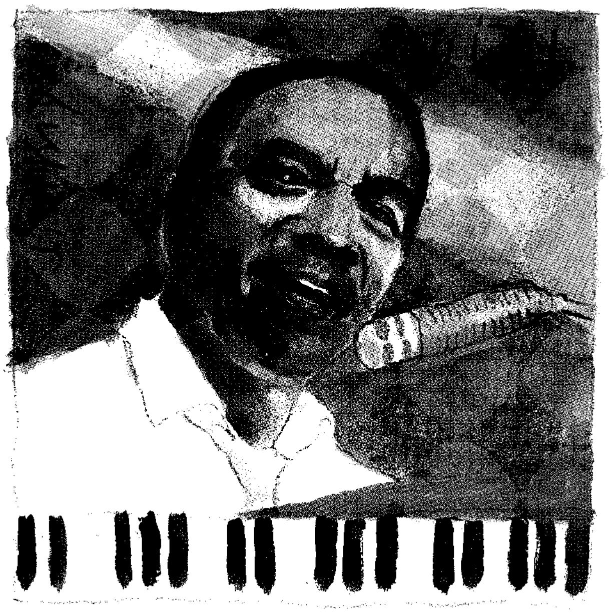
Gene Bertoncini, Michael Moore, and Ron Vincent—Twenty years after its inception, it's safe to say that the ever-inspired duo of guitarist Bertoncini and bassist Moore is one of the great partnerships of jazz. Never so inflexible that they can't add to their dulcet mix, they'll bring in drummer Vincent as a guest. (New School, 55 W. 13th St. No tickets necessary. Nov. 19 at 6:30.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Vocalist **ANDREA MARCOVICCI** is currently in the midst of an extended run. Dining.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Nov. 13-16: The **JOHN HICKS** and **BOBBY WATSON** quintet. Put two feverish, turn-me-loose-and-get-out-of-the-way hard-boppers like Hicks (piano) and Watson (alto sax) together, and get out the fire extinguisher. Their solos may be prolix, but their energy seems limitless. Dining.



Jimmy Smith, at Iridium.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Nov. 17: The **WAYNE SHORTER** quintet. Can someone please explain this career? As an influence on the contemporary, neo-traditional jazz generation, he's in the same league as Miles Davis and John Coltrane; his tenor- and soprano-saxophone stylings and his inimitable mid-sixties writings are virtual blueprints for the post-Marsalis brood. Shorter remains a master player—incisive, poignant, and elliptical—so why hasn't he made a memorable recording or led a first-rate band worthy of his extravagant gifts since "Native Dancer," in 1974? With his Weather Report shackles tossed off for a decade now, his continued reticence and adherence to lite fusion refuse to add up—it's maddening. That being said, Shorter is still not to be missed. Two bars of his gorgeous sound can be worth the price of admission. **CELIA CRUZ** takes over on Nov. 19. Dining.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Lots of young jazzmen love their R. & B., but they leave it home on their way to the night club or the recording studio. Not **JOSHUA REDMAN** (Nov. 14-15). There's always been a little grits and gravy in his neo-bop sax playing, but on his latest recording, "Freedom in the Groove," he wears da funk on his sleeve. With a guitarist now beefing up his band, he's all too ready to leap off the young-traditionalist wagon he rode in on. If he confounds one fan base, he's sure to entrance another.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—**BOBBY SHORT** continues through December.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Nov. 13: The **ERIC REED** quartet. His work with Wynton Marsalis has finally paid off: pianist Reed has developed into an assured soloist and a confident bandleader—someone to keep an eye on. Nov. 14-17: The **JIMMY SMITH** quartet. The wave of Hammond organists that has followed in the massive wake of Mr. Smith has yet to swamp him: no one can make the instrument purr and scream quite like he can. He's a sophisticated funkster who can turn a concert hall into a roadhouse and a club into a temple of the blues. The **MICHAEL BRECKER** quartet drops by on Nov. 19. Dining.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Nov. 15-16: The **JAZZ PASSENGERS** with **DEBBIE HARRY.** Though they still enjoy a joke more than your average band, these days the Jazz Passengers take themselves quite seriously as musicians—a fact that has helped them survive while other eighties downtown figures have fallen. At their least affected, the Passengers make clever, uncategorizable music.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The great cabaret in the sky. Vocalist **MAUREEN MC GOVERN** is the star-in-residence. Closed Mondays.

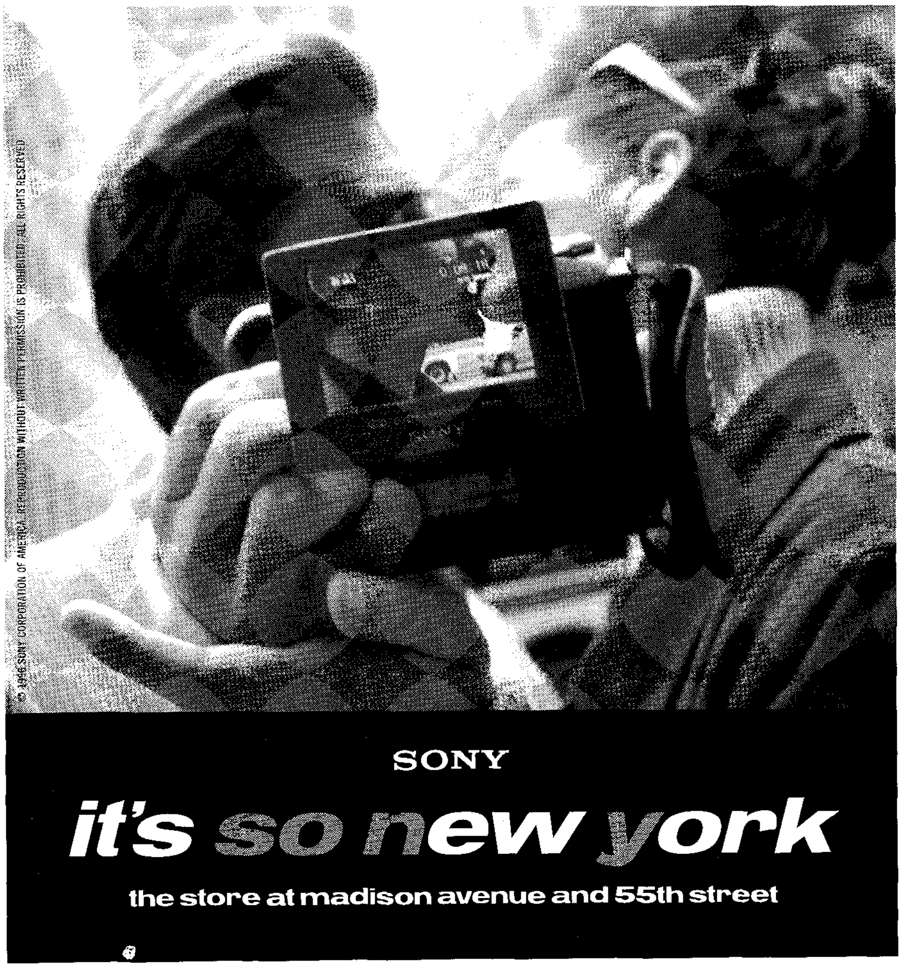
Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Nov. 17: **CYRUS CHESTNUT** is equal parts Art Tatum and Count Basie—a maniacal, two-handed speed demon who can also turn around and deliver the goods with a single note. His ability to straddle the line between prolixity and economy has been the chief fascination of his brief career. Like his celebrated peer Jacky Terrasson, Chestnut is a bit of a showoff: he can do any- and everything on his instrument—but who asked him to? When he relaxes, and his bluesy phrases flow like a woodland stream, he's untouchable. **GEORGE COLEMAN** gets the call on Nov. 19. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

ROCK, ETC.

Blarney Star, 43 Murray St. (732-2873)—Home to fine Irish music every Friday night. Fiddler **KEVIN BURKE** (Nov. 15) was a member of London's groundbreaking Celtic group, the Bothy Band, and he remains one of the preëminent instrumentalists in Irish music. He's backed by one of his mates from his current band, Patrick Street, the fine guitarist and singer **GED FOLEY.**

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Buddy Guy may be better known, but

GERARD NICOLAS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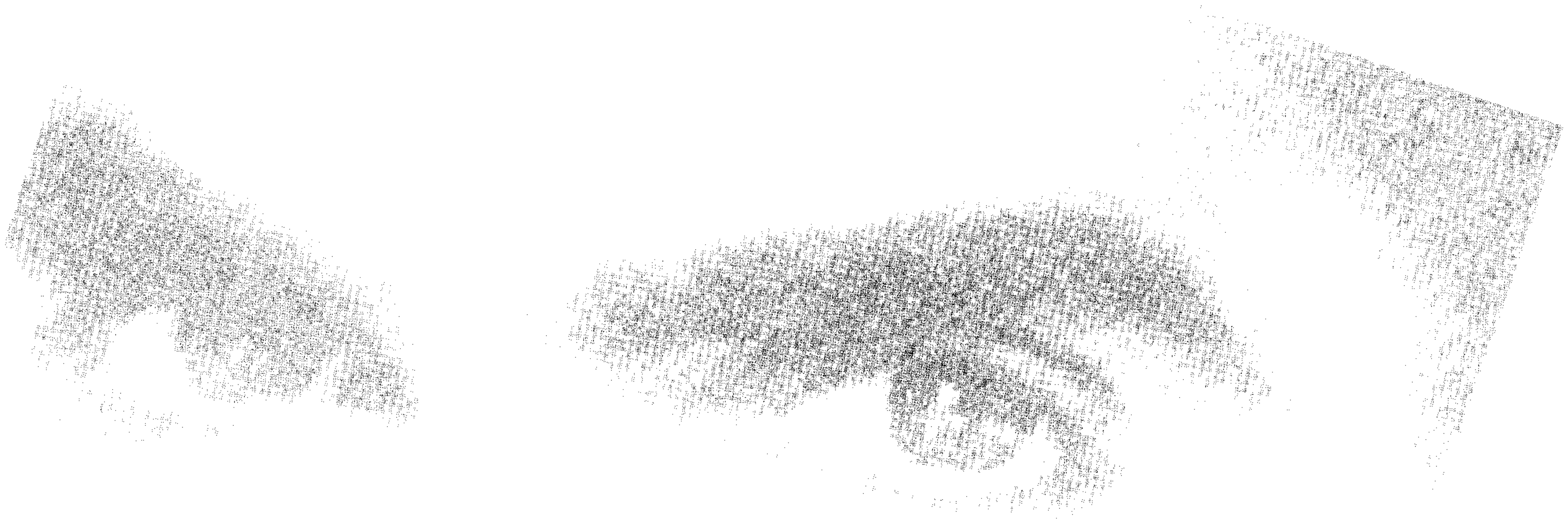

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ART: FRAVER

OTIS RUSH (in on Nov. 15-16) has been nipping at his ankles for more than four decades. Rush is nothing if not intense: his phrasing stings with a lyricism just this side of murderous, and his pledge "I've been wronged, but I won't be wronged again" is just as chilling. Dig out the first Led Zeppelin album to gauge Rush's seminal influence on rock—but don't blame him for the bombast.

FEZ, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Nov. 16: The gifted singer-songwriter **JANE KELLY WILLIAMS.** Nov. 19: **DONOVAN** started out as England's answer to Bob Dylan (as Dylan complained in "Don't Look Back," the documentary of his 1965 U.K. tour, "Every time I open a closet, Donovan falls out"), but he quickly traded his folkie corduroy cap for a Day-Glo garland, and, via songs like "Sunshine Superman" and "Wear Your Love Like Heaven," became the Alan O'Dale of psychedelia. His career nose-dived in the seventies, but he's just resurfaced on Rick Rubin's American label with a new album called "Sutra," and he's as sweetly cosmic as ever. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Nov. 15: The latest album by **CRACKER,** "The Golden Age," has songwriter David Lowery juggling, with newfound vigor, the same disparate sensibilities—white-trash woe and post-slacker doldrums—that defined the group's two prior disks (and Lowery's career with cult favorites Camper Van Beethoven). This may be the Golden Age, but he's still wondering where he fits in. ("I hate my generation.") If Lowery's depressed, at least he's finally earning a living.

MAXWELL'S, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-4064)—Nov. 15: As the brains behind the Dream Syndicate, **STEVE WYNN** was a high-ranking post-punk auteur; the group's 1982 LP, "The Days of Wine and Roses," was a cherished soundtrack to dorm-room angst, and it has worn surprisingly well. Backed by indie-rockers Come, the diminutive singer has returned with a strong effort, "Melting in the Dark," which proves that Wynn can still do a better Lou Reed than anybody—no easy task in today's crowded field.

MERCURY LOUNGE, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Nov. 13: **JIM LAUDERDALE** has a little bit of Roger Miller-style mischief in his soul, but his carefully crafted, slightly surreal song confections are far from novelty numbers. Nov. 14: **STEVE WYNN** (see Maxwell's).

TRAMPS, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Nov. 15-16: **BIG STAR** tops a heady bill. Along with the Velvet Underground and the Stooges, Big Star seemed to inspire anyone who ever heard them to start a band. Unlike the Velvets and the Stooges, however, no one has ever sounded quite like the short-lived Memphis combo that, in the early seventies, released records to glowing acclaim and no sales (a foolproof recipe for cult status). Led by Chris Bell and Alex Chilton—who sang "The Letter" with the Box Tops at age sixteen—the group's shimmering pop was obsessively structured yet shambolic; it, and the band itself, always seemed to ride a fine line between youthful optimism and crashing despair. Chilton has reassembled the old band with members of the Posies stepping in for the late Bell and original bassist Andy Hummell. Expect a somewhat more sardonic Chilton, and an audience eager to be pleased. With **YO LA TENGO,** whose "Electr-o-pura" was one of the shiningest moments of 1995; **SUPERDRAG,** a tuneful punk-pop quartet out of Knoxville; and **PERFECT,** featuring former teen rocker Tommy Stinson of the still-mourned Replacements.

ONLY CONNECT

NEW YORK SCRAPERS (http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/3366/nyc.html)—While the skyscrapers of Manhattan are the city's true landmarks, most New Yorkers have little time to look at them, let alone to really learn anything about them. It is all the more touching, then, that a Finnish architect, of all people, has put our best-known buildings on-line for us, making the leap from global village to virtual metropolis. NY Scrapers offers a picture-and-caption tour of the city's tallest and most notable structures, from the Chrysler Building (whose Art Deco spire, we learn, houses William Chrysler's first set of tools) to the faceless metal-and-glass monolith of Lever House. Size matters in the twentieth-century art of skyscraping: The Singer Tower (razed in 1968) was the world's tallest building when it went up in 1908, only to be bested by the Metropolitan Life Building the following year, and 40 Wall Street was to have held the record when completed in 1929, but the Chrysler Building sprinted past by adding the aforementioned spire.

There are two ways to approach the site: geographically, via a clickable map of Manhattan; or chronologically, through three period pages (Early Century, Art Deco Era, and International Style). The latter offer links to biographical information about the architects as well as summaries of the important developments (elevators, stress tests) that made the structures possible. There is plenty of gratuitous cyberstuff—the near-ubiquitous frames that allow you to manipulate different screens at once; Webcams directed from and toward the Empire State Building—but Scrapers is at its best a trove of trivia. Were you aware that the gargoyles on the Chrysler Building are American bald eagles? That the Met Life tower was modelled after the Campanile in front of San Marco in Venice? Or that the lobby of the Woolworth Building features a bronze bas-relief of old man Woolworth himself, counting his dimes?

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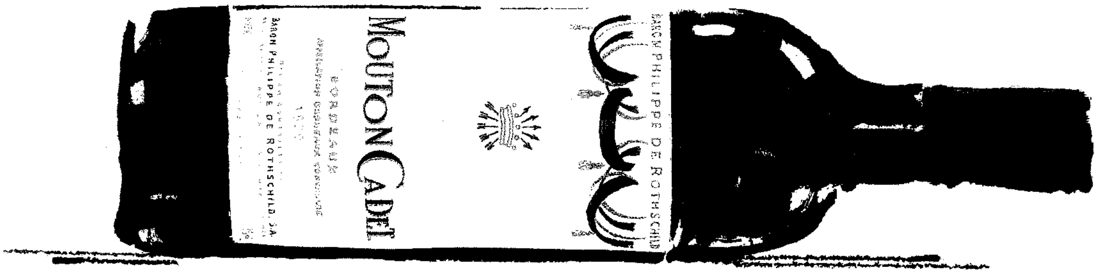
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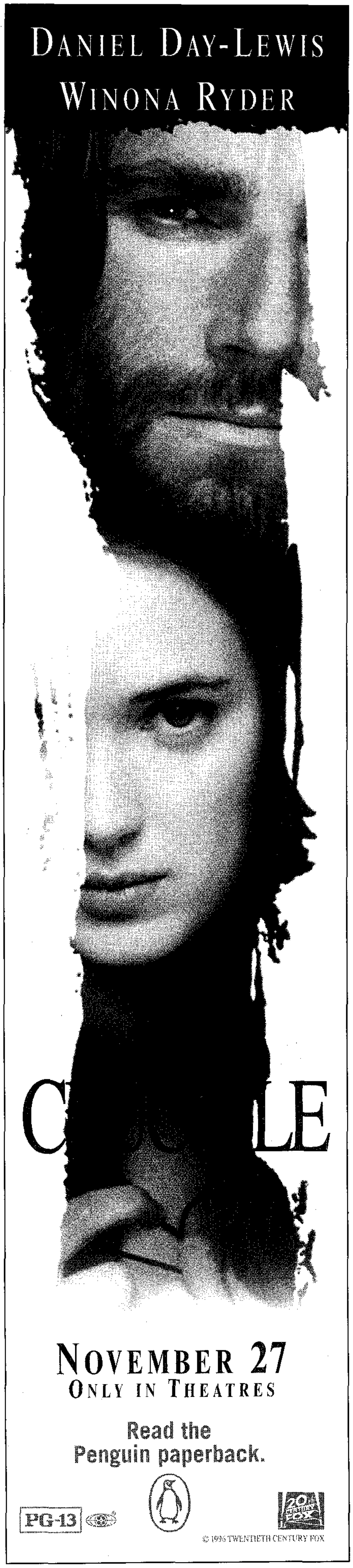
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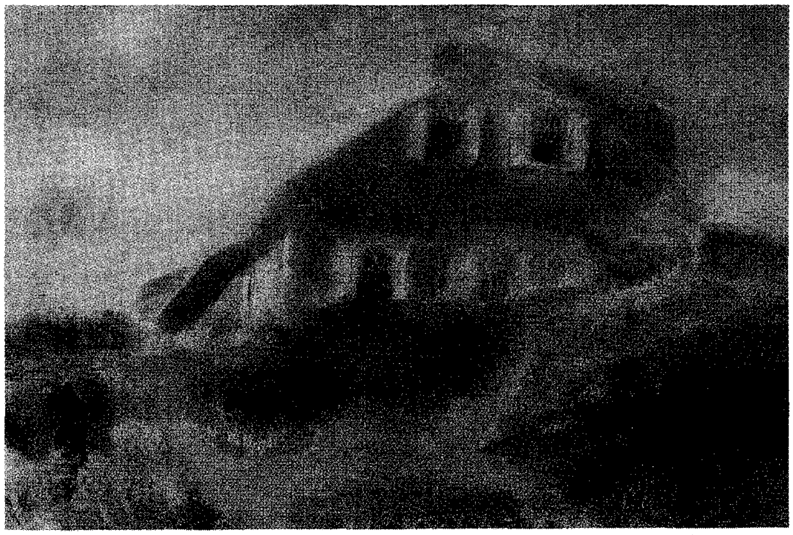
ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—A survey of a hundred and fifty canvases by the master landscape painter Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. Through Jan. 19. (For more Corot, see the Brooklyn Museum.) . . . ¶ "Queen Nefertiti and the Royal Women" presents narrative reliefs and sculptures from Egypt's Amarna period (1353-1336 B.C.). A complementary reinstallation of sculptures, reliefs, and other objects is on view in the Amarna Galleries. Through Feb. 2. . . . ¶ "Eugène Cuvelier, Photographer in the Circle of Corot," an exhibit of salted-paper prints from the eighteen-fifties and -sixties: streets and farmyards in the town of Barbizon, and exquisite, atmospheric views of the nearby Fontainebleau Forest. Through Jan. 12. . . . ¶ "Masterpieces in Little: Portrait Miniatures from the Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II." Through Jan. 5. . . . ¶ "Images of Women: Nineteenth-Century American Drawings and Watercolors" includes works by Sargent, Cassat, Eakins, Homer, and Whistler. Through Feb. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St.—The Jasper Johns retrospective features two hundred and twenty-five works—paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptures—and naturally includes a few flags, targets, numerals, and crosshatch patterns. Through Jan. 21. (A show of Johns's print work since 1960 is at Castelli, 578 Broadway, through Dec. 14.) . . . ¶ "Antonin Artaud: Works on Paper," an important exhibition of letters and drawings by one of this century's preëminent crazies. Though he is better known for his writing and acting, Artaud (1896-1948) also produced, in his final years (when he was confined to a mental institution), a substantial corpus of drawings in which he gave voice to feelings of profound anguish and lacerating disgust. His visual style has elements of both Surrealism and a wrenching realism; as you study his cadaverous portraits, both of himself and of people he knew, Lucian Freud's work may seem almost passé. Through Jan. 7. . . . ¶ "New Photography 12" features work by Richard Billingham, Thomas Demand, Osamu Kanemura, Sophie Ristelhueber, Georgina Starr, and Wolfgang Tillmans. Through Feb. 4. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Ellsworth Kelly," a large survey of the artist's paintings, sculptures, works on paper, and photographs. Through Jan. 19. (For more Kelly, see Galleries—Chelsea.) (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)



"House, Brewster" (1941), by Edwin Dickinson (De Nagy and Babcock).

COURTESY TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM SOHO, 575 Broadway, at Prince St.—"Max Beckmann in Exile," a display of twenty-four paintings, including several large triptychs, by the German Expressionist who left his homeland in 1937, after he had been declared (along with many others) a "degenerate artist." Through Jan. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—"I'll Be Your Mirror," a retrospective of Nan Goldin's disturbing photographs of the gritty, glamorous downtown life. Through Jan. 5. (A concurrent show of Goldin's pictures of children is at Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St., through Dec. 21.) . . . ¶ "Views from Abroad: European Perspectives on American Art 2" draws from the collections of the Whitney and the Museum für Moderne Kunst, in Frankfurt. Among the artists represented are Stephan Balkenhol, Lawrence Weiner, Jenny Holzer, Charles Ray, and Robert Gober. Through Jan. 5. . . . ¶ "Breuer's Whitney" includes drawings, photographs, models, and other objects chosen to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of Marcel Breuer's gray granite upside-down ziggurat. Through Dec. 8. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM, Eastern Parkway—"In the Light of Italy: Corot and Early Open-Air Painting," an exquisite exhibition of oil sketches which makes a marvellous pendant to the big Corot show at the Met. Through Jan. 12. . . . ¶ "The Arts of China," a sweeping reinstallation of paintings, scrolls, ceramics, and applied arts. . . . ¶ "Photography in Latin America: A Spiritual Journey." Through Jan. 19. . . . ¶ "The Evidence of Things Not Seen: Drawings by Glenn Ligon." Through Jan. 19. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS, Broadway at 155th St.—The forty-eighth annual purchase exhibition features works by Squeak Carnwath, Robert Colescott, Stephen Greene, Keith Jacobshagen, Lucas Samaras, and Idelle Weber. Through Dec. 1. (Open daily, except Mondays, 1 to 4.)

AMERICAN CRAFT MUSEUM, 40 W. 53rd St.—A mid-career survey of glazed ceramic, bronze, and mixed-medium works by Michael Lucero. Through Feb. 16. (A complementary survey of Lucero's work is at Parrasch, 20 W. 57th St., through Nov. 30.) (Open daily, except Mondays, 10 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

ASIA SOCIETY, Park Ave. at 70th St.—"Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions." The best work in this superb show manages to avoid mimicking the vernacular of Western modernism and postmodernism by drawing upon traditional forms. "Lingga-Yoni," an assemblage by the Indonesian sculptor Nindityo Adipurnomo, takes the Hindu icon of the male and female sex organs and neatly flips it, encasing a delicately decorated lingam in a rough box representing the yoni. N. N. Rimzon's crudely rendered image of a Jain deity menaced by massive swords makes its statement with unapologetic simplicity. Through Jan. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; Sundays, noon to 5.) . . . NOTE: The exhibition extends to N.Y.U.'s Grey Art Gallery (100 Washington Sq. E.; open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6:30; Wednesdays, 11:30 to 8:30; Saturdays, 11 to 5; through Dec. 23) and to the Queens Museum of Art (Flushing Meadows–Corona Park; open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5; through Jan. 5.)

CHINA INSTITUTE, 125 E. 65th St.—"The Life of a Patron: Zhou Lianggong and the Painters of Seventeenth-Century China" features a reassembled selection of works from the scholar-official's collection, which he stored on his houseboat. Through Dec. 21. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 5, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

THE JEWISH MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"The Illegal Camera." The Nazi occupation of the Netherlands is best known to most of us through Anne Frank's diary, but another secret record of the era was made by Dutch photographers, both professional and amateur; a selection of their work has been gathered in this stunning exhibition. Through Dec. 1. . . . ¶ "From Court Jews to the Rothschilds: Art, Patronage, and Power, 1600-1800." Through Jan. 19. . . . ¶ "Louis I. Kahn Drawings: Travel Sketches and Synagogue Projects." Through Dec. 15. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

MUSEUM OF AMERICAN FOLK ART, Columbus Ave. at 65th St.—"Pride of Place: Vernacular Architecture in American Folk Art" features paintings, sculptures, furniture, needlework, and decorative arts from the past three centuries. Through Jan. 5. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—"A History of Women Photographers," a survey that includes more than two hundred artists. Through Jan. 4. (Gottesman Exhibition Hall.) . . . ¶ Part II of "The Hand of the Poet" presents original manuscripts by the likes of Cummings, Moore, Merrill, Auden, Bishop, Lowell, Moss, Nabokov, and Sexton. Through Feb. 15. (Berg Collection. Closed Mondays.) . . . ¶ A rotating selection of drawings by Charles Addams, most of which appeared in these pages. Through Jan. 25. (Third Floor Corridor.) . . . ¶ "The Romance of the Stone: Lithography, 1796-1825." Through Jan. 11. (Third Floor Galleries.) (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, uptown and downtown galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; Chelsea galleries are generally closed Tuesdays and open Sundays.)

EDWIN DICKINSON (1891-1978)—A survey of the portraits and landscapes of a gifted, unjustly neglected American painter who spent much of his career on Cape Cod. The gloomy, turbulent seascapes and the soft-focus glimpses of New England houses and lawns (the latter executed in a restrained, beige-dominated palette) are more audacious than they seem at first glance, and they work their charm subtly. There are a few bursts of visionary fire, too: a self-portrait from 1914 has patches of vigorous near-abstraction that are as bold as just about anything that was going on in Europe at the time. Through Nov. 30. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. . . . NOTE: One floor down, another show of Dickinson's paintings is at Babcock, through Nov. 22.)

LOUISE FISHMAN—An exhibition of profound, highly accomplished abstractions. "Little Tang" begins with a translucent celadon ground, which the artist overlays with telegraphic bursts of light, like reflections on a cosmic pond. "Blonde

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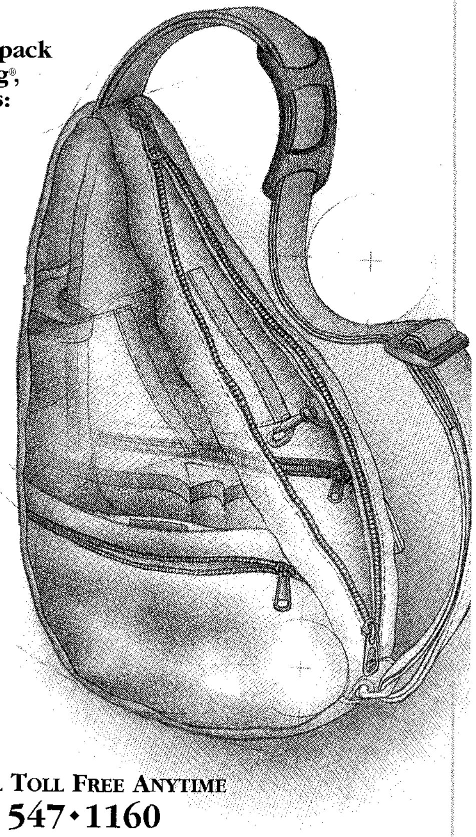

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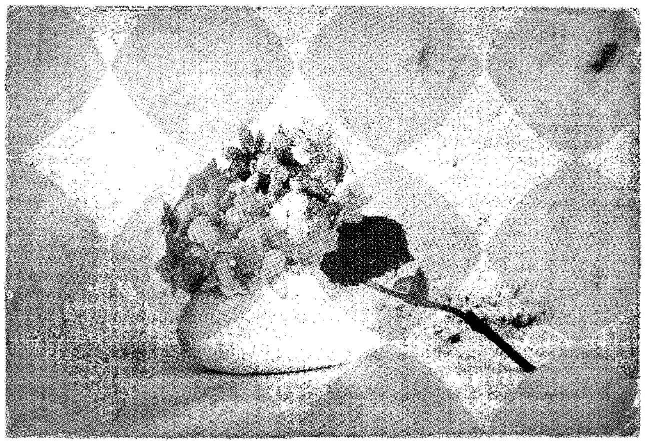

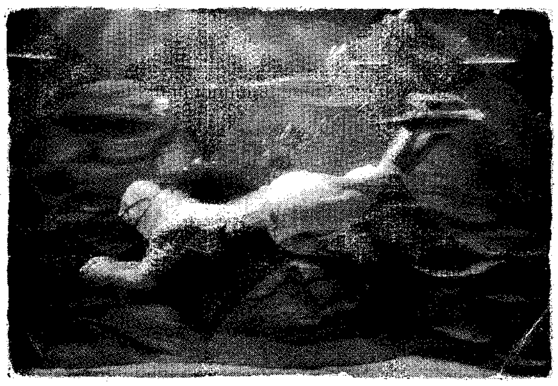

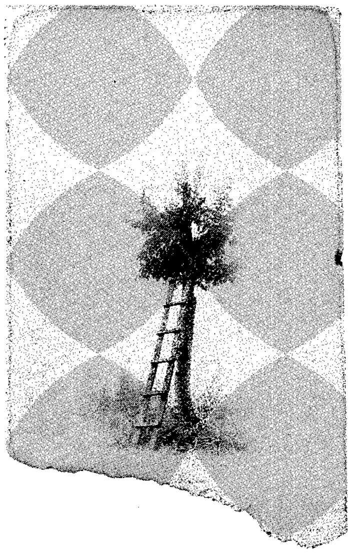

Three images from Masao Yamamoto's installation "A Box of Kú," at Richardson.

Ambition," a white-on-black homage to Kline, is executed with a deft, self-confident touch. The most impressive part of the show is a gallery of grid paintings. The grids alternate magically between heavy black holes and wispy clouds; the paintings effectively pull you into the picture plane and then push you back out. Through Nov. 16. (Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St.)

Lucian Freud—New paintings and drawings by Britain's best-known (and many would claim greatest) living artist. Freud's art does not deserve the reams of swooning guff routinely heaped upon it, nor is it as insubstantial as his detractors claim. His crusty, bumpy surfaces are both sensuous and repellent; in his hands, paint not only serves to mimic human flesh but also stands as its correlative. Favoring gargantuan models who could not be further from traditional ideals of beauty, Freud continues to dwell obsessively on bodily deliquescence. Through Nov. 16. (Acquavella, 18 E. 79th St. Open Mondays.)

Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926) **and Joan Busquets** (1874-1949) / **Derrick Guild**—Elaborate, fantastic furnishings—settees, pews, clocks, mirrors—designed for Barcelona's parks, residences, and palaces. / The first United States show of still-lifes by the Scottish painter. Both shows through Nov. 30. (Stone, 113 E. 90th St.)

Gerhard Richter—The protean artist's endlessly ironic oeuvre combines a realist mode based on photography and an abstract mode that looks weirdly mechanical: it's ultra-sophisticated and every bit as intelligent as it is sensuous. This show features recent paintings in both modes, most of them stunning. There's so much exhaustive virtuosity on display that you may feel like muttering "You win, you win" as you leave. Through Nov. 30. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. Open Mondays.)

Lucas Samaras—A museum-quality retrospective by a fascinating artist who has kept the spirit of Dada alive. What a profusion of ideas, and what a scintillating imagination—literally: this is the shiniest show in town, glittering with rhinestones, mirrors, aluminum foil, razor blades, and brass tacks. The exhibition (which extends to the gallery's SoHo space) is exceptionally well chosen, from the early "inedibles" (nightmarish meals served on broken plates with mangled cutlery) to the spiky, threatening Formica cubes to the enormously influential photography. There are some oil paintings, too, and an amusing twenty-four-minute film, made in 1969, in which the artist, as it were, eats himself: he spells out the word "self" on his tongue in alphabet macaroni, and then swallows it. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St., through Nov. 30; 142 Greene St., through Dec. 14.)

AIDS Memorial Quilt—More than a dozen panels are on view. Through Nov. 15. (Equitable, Seventh Ave. at 51st St. Open weekdays, 7 to 7.)

Short List—**Romare Bearden,** ACA, 41 E. 57th St. Through Dec. 7. . . . **Ronald Bladen,** Sculpture Center, 167 E. 69th St. Through Dec. 21. . . . **Elaine de Kooning,** Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. Through Nov. 30. . . . **Tamara de Lempicka,** Friedman, 32 E. 67th St. Through Nov. 30. . . . **Carol Diehl,** Hirschl & Adler Modern, 21 E. 70th St. Through Nov. 30. . . . **Eric Fischl,** Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through Dec. 21. . . . **Caio Fonseca,** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. Through Nov. 30. . . . **Andy Goldsworthy,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. Through Jan. 4. . . . **Michael Lucero,** Parrasch, 20 W. 57th St. Through Nov. 30. . . . **Henri Matisse,** C & M Arts, 45 E. 78th St. Through Dec. 7. . . . **Carroll Todd,** Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. Through Nov. 23.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Lovett/Codagnone—The artists have fashioned photo cubes in various sizes, from standard coffee-table dimensions to one resembling a hefty minimalist block, and filled them with snapshotlike pictures of themselves in various S & M guises, in the company of their families—images that make witty reference to the fantasies of domestic comfort even as they undermine the usual expectations. Through Nov. 24. (XL, 504 W. 22nd St.)

Brenda Zlamany—Paintings (it's tempting to call them portraits) of snakes, rendered in a meticulously realistic, slickly varnished style. The artist invests her subjects with just enough creepy fetishism to lift the images out of Discovery Channel banality. Through Nov. 24. (Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St.)

Short List—**Carl Andre,** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. Open Tuesdays; closed Sundays; through Nov. 23. . . . **Ann Daly,** Kirkland, 504 W. 22nd St. Through Nov. 24. . . . **Renée Green,** Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. Through Nov. 24. . . . **Ellsworth Kelly,** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. Closed Wednesdays; opens at noon; through Jan. 19. . . . **Stephen Mueller,** Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Tuesdays; closed Sundays; through Dec. 7. . . . **Andy Spence,** Morris Healy, 530 W. 22nd St. Through Nov. 24.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Richard Serra—"58x64x70," six massive solid-steel blocks, each one weighing thirty-six tons. Serra's best work is the aesthetic equivalent of winning through intimidation. Through Dec. 14. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St.)

William Wegman—New paintings and drawings that incorporate greeting cards and photographs as collage elements. No weimaraners here: most of these pictures are landscapes. Some of the drawings have a certain lazy whimsy; the paintings, on the other hand, are big, murky, disagreeably messy affairs. Through Nov. 30. (Gorney, 100 Greene St.)

"Plains Indian Drawings, 1865-1935"—A large exhibition of ledger drawings—works made on paper from bound books appropriated from white traders and officers—by artists from the Lakota, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho tribes. Through Dec. 21. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. Open Wednesday evenings until 8.)

Short List—**Ida Applebroog,** Feldman, 31 Mercer St. Through Dec. 7. . . . **Jean-Michel Basquiat,** Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St. Through Nov. 23. . . . **Mel Bochner,** Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. Through Nov. 30. . . . **Alighiero e Boetti** and **Kim MacConnel,** Holly Solomon, 172 Mercer St. Both shows through Dec. 21. . . . **Robert Colescott,** Kind, 136 Greene St. Through Jan. 4. . . . **Teresita Fernández,** Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. Through Nov. 30. . . . **Joseph Marioni,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. Through Dec. 28. . . . **Gordon Matta-Clark,** Fung, 537 Broadway. Through Dec. 14. . . . **Bruce Nauman,** Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. Through Dec. 14. . . . **Albert Oehlen,** Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. Through Nov. 16. . . . **Irving Petlin,** Kent, 67 Prince St. Through Dec. 21. . . . **Beverly Semmes,** Klein, 40 Wooster St. Through Nov. 30. . . . **Donald Sultan,** Kasmin, 74 Grand St. Through Dec. 7. . . . **Franz West,** Zwirner, 43 Greene St. Through Nov. 30. . . . **Andrea Zittel,** Rosen, 130 Prince St. Through Dec. 7.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Nov. 13: Auctions of Impressionist and modern art and French silver. . . . ¶ Nov. 19-20: Contemporary art. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's—Impressionist and modern art. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000. Nov. 13-14.)

Doyle's—Books, maps, and manuscripts, including material related to the brothers Gershwin. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. Nov. 13.)

Swann's—Works on paper from the fifteenth century through the twentieth. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Nov. 14.)

Modernism—The annual decorative-arts show. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. For information, call 777-5218. Nov. 14-17.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Petah Coyne / Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-79)—Eighteen black-and-white prints by the sculptor, from four series: "Monks," "Piñata," "Carnival," and "Fourth of July, 1995." / Original albumen prints of Cameron's well-known portraits (including Mrs. Herbert Duckworth and Sir John Herschel), along with a group of allegorical studies. Both shows through Dec. 28. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St.)

Cindy Sherman—The artist's first feature film, a horror movie, is due out early next year,

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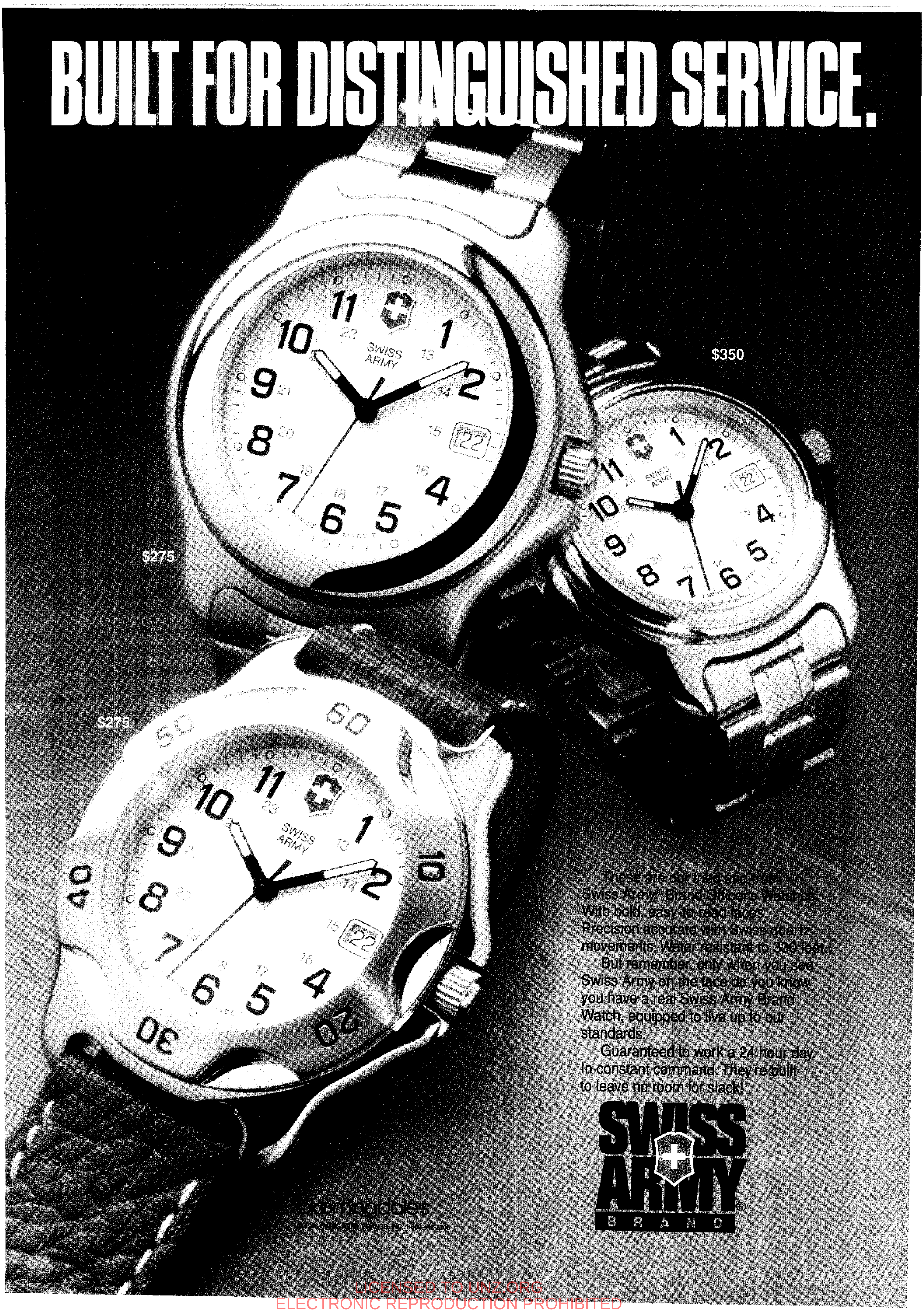

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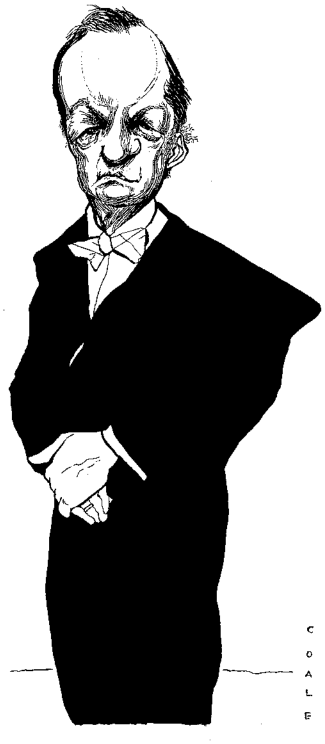
and the large-scale color photographs in this exhibit reflect her immersion in the world of slashers, axe wielders, and cannibalistic mutants. The pictures are all head shots, and often it's hard to tell whether they represent victims or maniacs. Through Nov. 23. (Metro Pictures, 150 Greene St.)

Alex Webb—It seems like getting colors to pop—to step up and define a composition—is as easy for Webb as tying a shoe. Although his images of life in a wide range of Florida communities are, on the whole, less vivid than his better-known, highly personal reportage in the Caribbean (especially Haiti) and Africa, there are more than a few stoppers: five Haitian sugarcane cutters, all dressed in shades of brown, waiting for work (or pay); a black boy at Miami Beach, his bright orange towel billowing like a scarf, silhouetted against lavender-and-aqua picnic tables and the lowering gray sky. Through Dec. 7. (Leica, 670 Broadway. Opens Saturdays at noon.)

Masao Yamamoto—"A Box of Kú." In the fifth century, Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen in China, taught the practice of "wall-gazing" as a way toward enlightenment. The same principle seems to be at work in this enchanting show. Yamamoto (who is from Japan) has taped scores of small pictures on one side of the gallery and, on the other, hung some more in decorative frames. His range of images—landscapes, animals, nudes, clouds—mirrors his range of styles: formalist, minimalist, surrealist, snapshot. The installation invites you to wash over it again and again, gazing from close up and from afar, as you discover serendipitous associations of feeling, form, and memory. In the back room is an old leather valise full of more pictures; here you can sit, poring over them, inching your way toward satori. Through Nov. 16. (Richardson, 560 Broadway.)

Short List—**HORACE BRISTOL**, Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. Through Nov. 16. . . . **CHUCK CLOSE**, Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. Through Nov. 23. . . . **MARGARET COURTNEY-CLARKE**, Witkin, 415 West Broadway. Through Nov. 30. . . . **LYNN DAVIS**, Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. Through Jan. 4. . . . **LEE FRIEDLANDER**, Borden, 560 Broadway. Through Nov. 23. . . . **TRIA GIOVAN**, Stellweg, 87 E. Houston St., between Elizabeth St. and Bowery. Closed Tuesdays; through Nov. 16. . . . **NAN GOLDIN**, Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. Through Dec. 21. . . . **CHARLES HOFF**, Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. Through Nov. 16. . . . **DAVID LA CHAPELLE**, Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway, in their new space on the third floor. Through Nov. 30. . . . **ABELARDO MORELL**, Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. Through Nov. 30. . . . **MATTHIEU RICARD**, Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. Through Dec. 28. . . . **STEPHEN SACK**, Danziger, 130 Prince St. Through Nov. 23. . . . **SAM SAMORE**, Nordanstad, 289 Hudson St., at Spring St. Through Dec. 7. . . . **TSENG KWONG CHI**, Saul, 560 Broadway. Through Nov. 30. . . . **MARGARET WATKINS**, Mann, 42 E. 76th St. Through Jan. 4. . . . **IWAO YAMAWAKI**, Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. Through Nov. 16.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Jewish Museum, and the New York Public Library.)



Nikolaus Harnoncourt, conducting Beethoven at Carnegie Hall.

HOWARD COALE

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330; and for the 92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St., 996-1100.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—**L'ELISIR D'AMORE**, with Barbara Bonney, Roberto Alagna, Simon Keenlyside, and Paul Plishka; conducted by Carlo Rizzi. (Nov. 13 at 8.) With Stanford Olsen instead of Mr. Alagna. (Nov. 18 at 8.) . . . **LA TRAVIATA**, with Ainhoa Arteta, Marcello Giordani, and Kim Josephson; Maurizio Barbacini. (Nov. 14 at 8.) . . . **CARMEN**, with Hei-Kyung Hong, Waltraud Meier, Luis Lima, and Sergei Leiferkus; James Levine. (Nov. 15 at 8.) . . . **RIGOLETTO**, with Ruth Ann Swenson, Mr. Alagna, and Juan Pons; Mr. Rizzi. (Nov. 16 at 1:30.) . . . **COSÌ FAN TUTTE**, with Renée Fleming, Suzanne Mentzer, Marie McLaughlin, Paul Groves, Dwayne Croft, and William Shimell; Mr. Levine. (Nov. 16 at 8 and Nov. 19 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

New York City Opera—Opening performances of "Brigadoon," by Lerner and Loewe, with Rebecca Luker, Judy Kaye, Brent Barrett, and Sean Donnellan; conducted by John McGlinn. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Nov. 13-15 at 8, Nov. 16 at 1:30 and 8, and Nov. 17 at 1:30. Through Nov. 24.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—When he consented to compose a work celebrating Britten's "Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra," the Danish composer Poul Ruders wisely decided not to go head-on with the classic. Like Britten, he cast his "Concerto in Pieces" as variations on a theme by Purcell, but he picked a different tune: the Witches' "Ha-Ha" Chorus from "Dido and Aeneas." And, where Britten successively spotlighted the orchestra's various instrumental families, Ruders explores combinations of instrumental sonorities—sometimes very curious ones. Andrew Davis leads the "Concerto in Pieces" in this concert, which also includes Grieg's Piano Concerto (with the Canadian pianist Louis Lortie) and Elgar's "Enigma" Variations. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Nov. 14, Nov. 15, and Nov. 16, all at 8, and Nov. 19 at 7:30.)

New York Metamorphoses Orchestra—The ensemble performs works that inspired choreography by George Balanchine—Stravinsky's "Apollon Musagète," Hindemith's "The Four Temperaments" (featuring pianist Stella Simakova), and Prokofiev's "Prodigal Son"—as well as the première of David Israel's "Dialogue Between Stravinsky and Balanchine," a double concerto for violin and piano. (Masonic Hall, 71 W. 23rd St., at Sixth Ave. Nov. 13 at 8. For information about tickets, call 516-329-6166.)

St. Petersburg Chamber Choir—Nikolai Korniev directs the ensemble in selections from Rachmaninoff's "Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom" and "All-Night Vigil"; Dmitri Hvorostovsky is featured in works for solo baritone with choir, by six composers of the Slavic sacred tradition. (Alice Tully Hall. Nov. 14 at 8.)

New York Pops—The Broadway star Ben Vereen joins conductor Skitch Henderson. (Carnegie Hall. Nov. 15 at 8.)

"Concert of Remembrance"—This year, the annual Holocaust commemoration includes a new oratorio by Ronald Senator, Morton Gould's "Holocaust Suite," and a suite from John Williams's score for "Schindler's List," performed by the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra and conducted by Paul Polivnick. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. Nov. 16 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

The Nine—Nikolaus Harnoncourt leads the Chamber Orchestra of Europe in performances of all nine of Beethoven's symphonies, at Carnegie Hall. Nov. 16 at 8: The Symphonies No. 4 and No. 5. . . . ¶ Nov. 17 at 2: The Symphonies No. 8 and No. 6. . . . ¶ Nov. 19 at 8: The Symphonies No. 1 and No. 3. (The cycle continues on Nov. 20 and Nov. 23.)

Canterbury Choral Society—Performing Mendelssohn's "Elijah," with Charles Dodsley Walker directing. (Church of the Heavenly Rest, Fifth Ave. at 90th St. Nov. 17 at 4. Admission by contribution.)

Arnold Schoenberg Choir—Erwin Ortner directs the Viennese chorus in a wide-ranging program that includes works by Schubert, Brahms, Schoenberg (of course), and Roman Haubenstock-Ramati. (Merkin Concert Hall. Nov. 19 at 8.)

RECITALS

Kronos String Quartet—The foursome explores trends in contemporary composition. Nov. 13 at 7: Music drawn from folk sources, by Ken Benshoof, Mo Wuping, and Osvaldo Golijov (his "The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind"). . . . ¶ Nov. 15 at 8: Works inspired by ancient liturgical models, by Górecki, Pärt, and Harry Partch (with medieval pieces by Perotin and Hildegard of Bingen by way of comparison). . . . ¶ Nov. 16 at 8: Works by American experimentalists Tim Berne, Mark Feldman, and Terry Riley. (Carey Playhouse, Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

Alicia de Larrocha—The pianist plays Bach's C-Minor Fantasia, English Suite No. 2, and D-Minor Chaconne (as transcribed by Busoni), as well as works by Spanish composers: three preludes by Mompou and selections from Granados's "Goyescas" (Part I, complete, and "El Pelele" from Part II). (Carnegie Hall. Nov. 13 at 7:30.)

Speculum Musicae—The twentieth-century-music ensemble performs chamber works by Berg, Copland, Ingolf Dahl, Silvestre Revueltas, Rand Steiger, and Jaroslaw Kapuscinski. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. 734-2130. Nov. 13 at 8.)

Yosif Feigelson—Cellist, with pianist Mark Pakman, performing works by Bolcom, Boccherini, Beethoven, and others. (Weill Art Gallery, 92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. Nov. 14 at 2. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 996-1100.)

Bargemusic—Mezzo-soprano Alexandra Hughes, violinist Mark Peskanov, and pianist Polina Vyshko offer a program that includes music by Mozart and Beethoven, and contemporary songs by American composers including Ives, Bernstein, and Copland. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Nov. 14 at 7:30 and Nov. 17 at 4.)

Sumi Jo—The Korean soprano offers a program featuring works by Rossini, Mozart, and Strauss, with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, conducted by Richard Bonynge. (Carnegie Hall. Nov. 14 at 8.)

Carmina String Quartet—The Swiss players offer quartets by Haydn (in D Minor, Op. 76, No. 2), Debussy, and Dvořák (his Twelfth). (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. Nov. 15 at 8.)

Guarneri Quartet—Playing string quartets by Mozart (in F Major, K. 168), Bartók (his First), and Brahms (in C Minor, Op. 51, No. 1). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Nov. 16 at 8.)

Ex Novo Ensemble of Venice—The group offers Venetian music both old (by Giovanni Gabrieli and Vivaldi) and new (by Nono and Maderna, among others). (92nd Street Y. Nov. 16 at 8.)

Esther Budiardjo—The twenty-three-year-old Indonesian pianist, playing works by Mendels-

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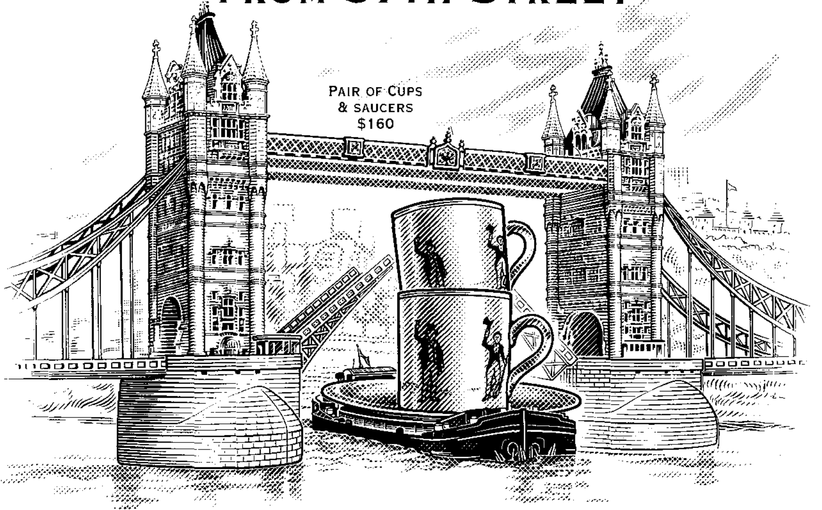

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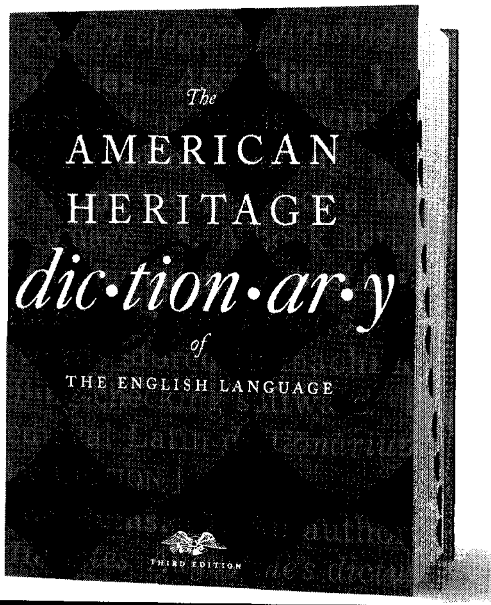


HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

THE DICTIONARY FOR OUR TIMES

sohn, Perle, Balakirev, and Beethoven. (Alice Tully Hall. Nov. 16 at 8.)

Samuel Bartos—Pianist, discussing and performing Bach's "Goldberg" Variations. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Nov. 17 at noon.)

Jennifer Larmore—The mezzo-soprano with one of the smoothest techniques in the business offers music by Handel, Purcell, Fauré, Gounod, Mozart, and Rossini; with pianist Antoine Palloc. (Alice Tully Hall. Nov. 17 at 2.)

En Suite—Two cellists share the duties in a complete traversal of Bach's suites for unaccompanied cello. Nov. 17 at 2: Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi plays the Suites No. 2, No. 4, and No. 6. . . . ¶ Nov. 18 at 8: Nathaniel Rosen performs the Suites No. 1, No. 3, and No. 5. (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University; enter at Broadway and 116th St. For information about tickets, call 854-7799.)

Claude Frank—The pianist performs Beethoven's Sonatas in G Major (Op. 31, No. 1), F Minor (Op. 57), and C Minor (Op. 111), as well as his Variations on "Nel cor più non mi sento." (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 722-4448. Nov. 17 at 3.)

Absolute Ensemble—Kristjan Järvi leads works by Hindemith and Schoenberg, as well as new compositions or new settings of works by Jack Perla, Dave Brubeck ("In Your Own Sweet Way," arranged by Matt Herskowitz, who will double as piano soloist), and Charles Mingus ("Good-Bye Pork Pie Hat," arranged by Ian Frenkel). (Merkin Concert Hall. Nov. 17 at 3.)

Gregory Turay—Tenor, with pianist Thomas Bagwell and the Elsner String Quartet, in a program that includes Vaughan Williams's "On Wenlock Edge." Presented by Young Concert Artists. (92nd Street Y. Nov. 17 at 3.)

Kenneth Roberson—Baritone, singing Schumann's "Dichterliebe," Ravel's "Don Quichotte à Dulcinée," and works by Copland and Paul Creston; with pianist DeWitt Tipton. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. 734-2130. Nov. 17 at 3.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—Performing Charles-Martin Loeffler's Two Rhapsodies for Oboe, Viola, and Piano; Brahms's Horn Trio; and Dohnányi's C-Minor Piano Quintet. (Alice Tully Hall. Nov. 17 at 5 and Nov. 19 at 7:30.)

Da Capo Chamber Players—The ensemble makes its contribution to this year's Sonic Boom Festival with works by Elliott Carter (his Cello Sonata and Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello, and Harpsichord among them), Cowell, and Goffredo Petrassi. A documentary about Mr. Carter will also be screened. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Nov. 17 at 7:30.)

Waltraud Meier—Mezzo-soprano, performing Berg's "Seven Early Songs," Schumann's "Frauenliebe und -leben," Wagner's "Wesendonck-Lieder," and selections from Mahler's "Des Knaben Wunderhorn"; with pianist Nicholas Carthy. (Carnegie Hall. Nov. 17 at 7:30.)

Millennium Chamber Ensemble—The group performs Schoenberg's "Ode to Napoleon" (with baritone Christòpheren Nomura) and excerpts from Elvis Costello's "The Juliet Letters." (Merkin Concert Hall. Nov. 18 at 7.)

Da Camera of Houston—Pianist Sarah Rothenberg, who directs this chamber ensemble, has made a specialty of devising programs that illuminate relationships between music and literature. In this one, titled "St. Petersburg Legacy," she plays the Second Piano Sonata by Galina Ustvolskaya (a Shostakovich protégée whose writing sometimes touches the outskirts of the outré), and her colleagues perform works by Arthur Lourié and Shostakovich. The program also includes readings from works by Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, Joseph Brodsky, and other St. Petersburg poets. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. For information about tickets, call 875-5050. Nov. 18 at 7:30.)

Eric Grossman—The violinist plays Bartók's Unaccompanied Sonata, and pianist Ilan Rechtman joins him for Saint-Saëns's D-Minor Violin Sonata. (Mansfield Hotel, 12 W. 44th St. Nov. 18 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

David Leisner—Performing an all-Bach program on the guitar. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. Nov. 18 at 8.)

Eugenia Zukerman and Anthony Newman—The flutist and the keyboardist perform music by Bach, Biber, and Handel. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 930-0571. Nov. 19 at 6.)

New Millennium Ensemble—Performing chamber works by Carter, John Adams, and William Albright, among others. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Nov. 19 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

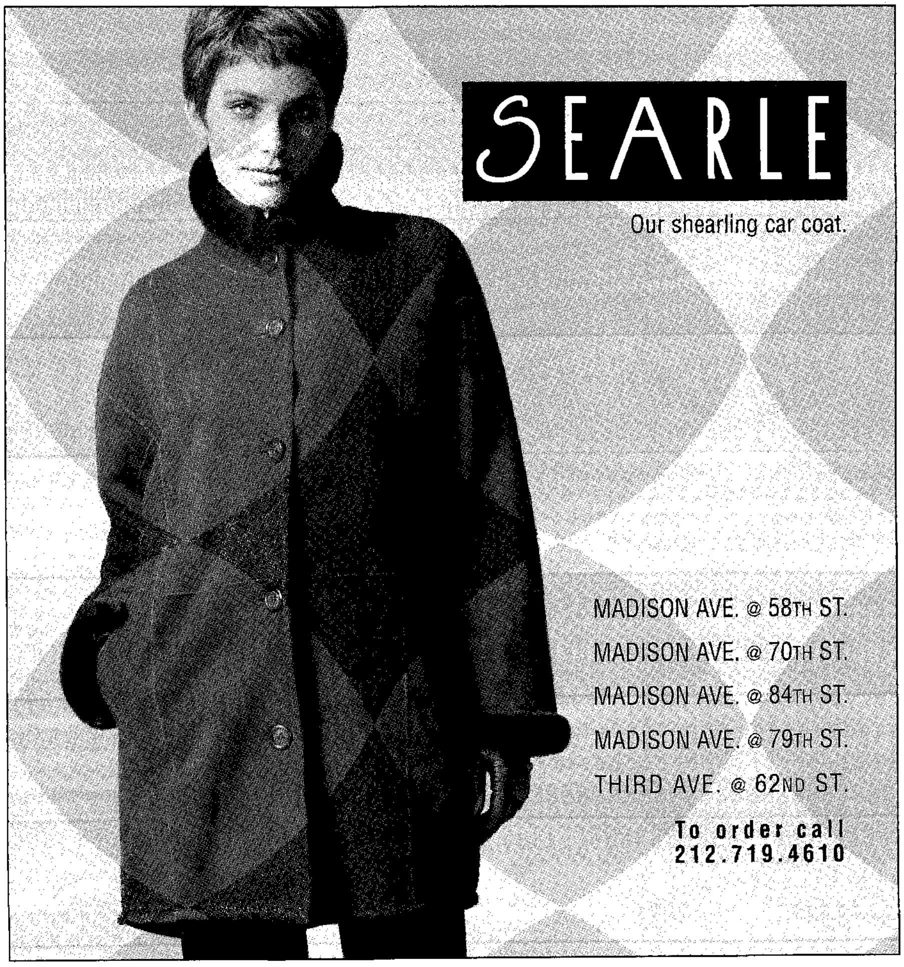
Serve Somebody—Fifteen stars of women's tennis will compete at Madison Square Garden this week for the richest purse in their tour, and the play should be hotly contested. Unfortunately, one of them will have to beat Steffi Graf. Fans of dramatic matches pitting equally gifted opponents had best go early; those who prefer to watch a dominant player dispose of the opposition with a complete arsenal of shots should wait until later, when Graf, inevitably, ascends to the five-set finals. (Nov. 18-24. For schedule information, call 307-7171.)

Above Average—Garrison Keillor brings the radiocraft of the Great Plains to Town Hall, whence for the next four Saturdays he will broadcast "A Prairie Home Companion." This week jazz pianist Jaki Byard and the cast of "Radio Gals" make the music. Tom Keith provides the sound effects (creaks, barks, elephants trumpeting, etc.). (123 W. 43rd St. 307-7171. Nov. 16 at 5:45.)

Readings—Nov. 13 at 8: Poets Olga Broumas and T Begley read from their collaborative work, "Sappho's Gymnasium." (Poetry Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Nov. 15 at 8: Charlie Smith and Melvin Jules Bukiet read from their novels "Cheap Ticket to Heaven" and "After," respectively. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Nov. 15 at 9 and 11: In "1001 Real Apes," David Greenberger, accompanied by the band Birdsongs of the Mesozoic, recounts oral histories collected in his magazine *Duplex Planet*. (Fez, 380 Lafayette St. 533-7000.) . . . ¶ Nov. 19 at 6:30: *Columbia Journal* contributors Rick Moody, Sheila Kohler, and Jan Meissner present new work at a benefit reading. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 362-2590.) . . . ¶ Nov. 19 at 8:30: Australian poet John Kinsella reads from his work. (An Beal Bocht Café, 445 W. 238th St., the Bronx. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—Nov. 13 at 6: *National Geographic* writer Robyn Davidson shows slides of her trek across the Thar desert in northwestern India with Rabari nomads. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 930-0571.) . . . ¶ Nov. 13 at 6:30: In a slide presentation based on his book "Batman Collected," Caped Crusader fan Chip Kidd discusses his chiropterandrophilia. (Rizzoli, 454 West Broadway. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Nov. 13 at 8: Robert Bernstein of Human Rights Watch interviews Chinese dissident Harry Wu, a onetime internee of Laogai, the Chinese gulag. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.) . . . ¶ Nov. 14 at 7: Former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, among others, considers C.I.A. involvement in the war on drugs. (All Souls Unitarian Church, Lexington Ave. at 80th St. No tickets necessary.)

Walks—Nov. 14 at 2: Herbalist Letha Hadady picks through Chinatown apothecaries for such commonplace cure-alls as ginger and clove and for more unusual physics, such as lotus root and longan fruit. For more information, call 996-1100. . . . ¶ Nov. 16 at noon and 2: Tom Fedorek of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine rises to religious heights, in a tour of the cathedral's vaulting. For reservations, call 932-7347.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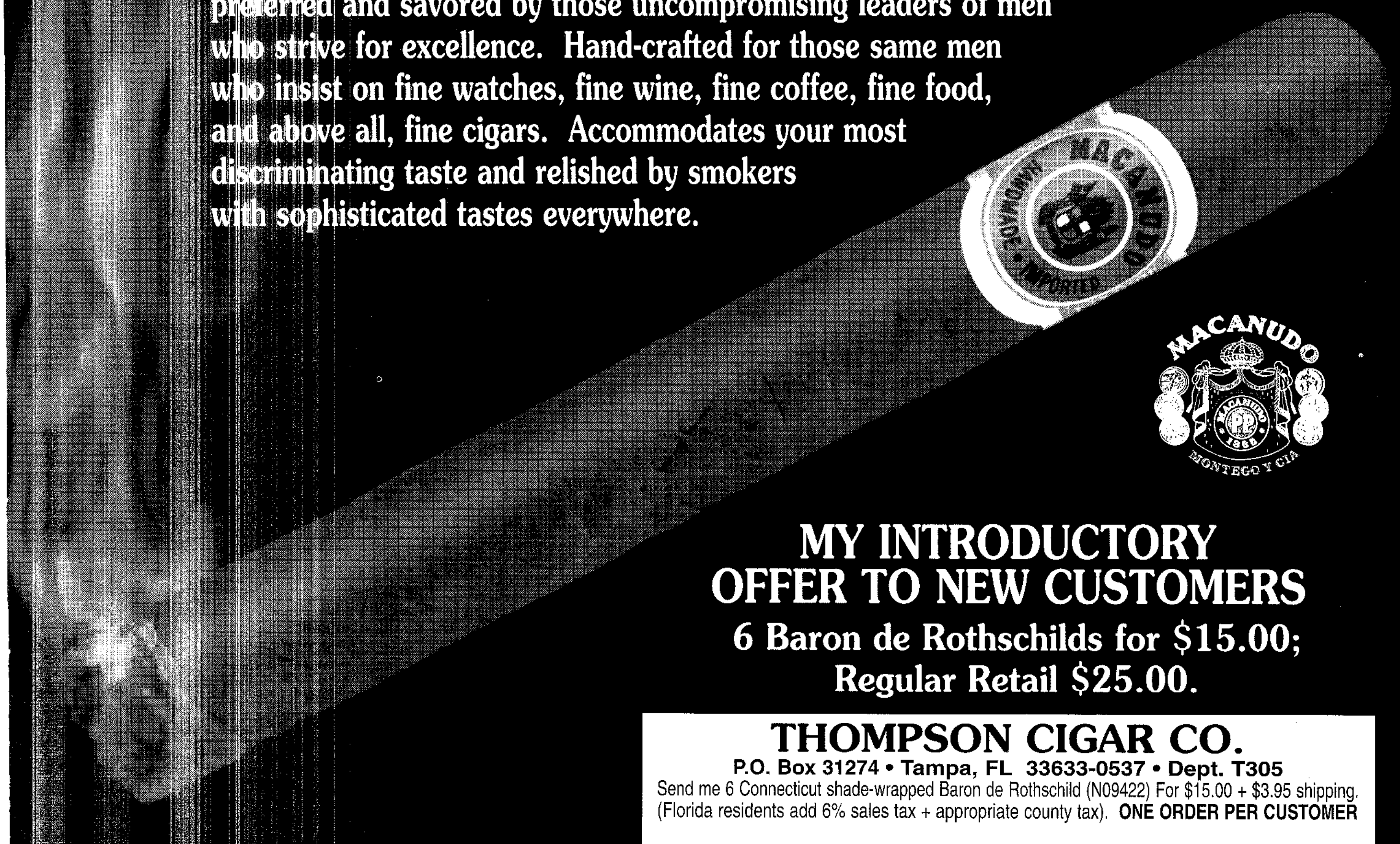

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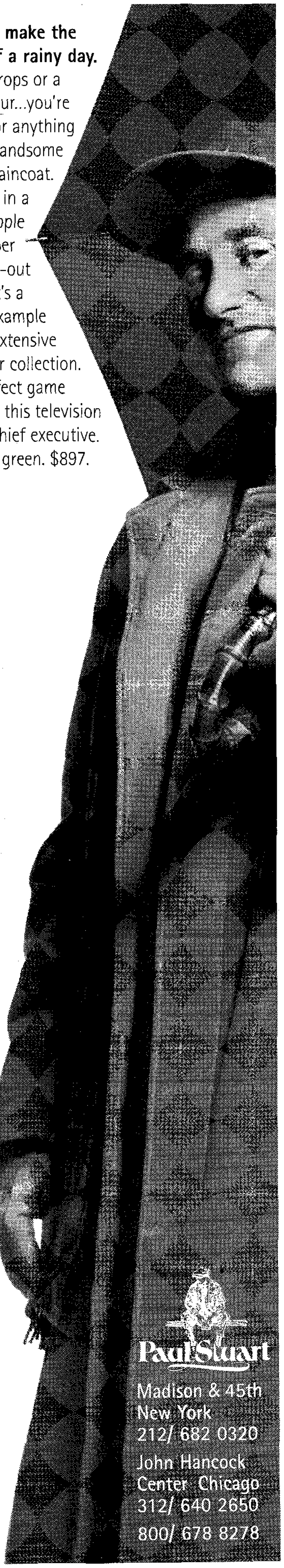

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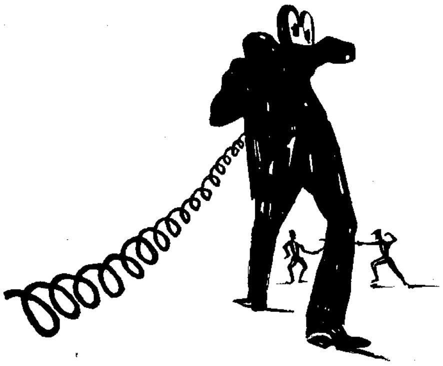

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Anna—A documentary about life in contemporary Russia, by Nikita Mikhalkov ("Burnt by the Sun"). In Russian. Opening Nov. 13. (Film Forum.)

Breaking the Waves—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 13. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

The English Patient—Anthony Minghella's version of the 1992 novel by Michael Ondaatje, about a disfigured fighter pilot and the nurse who attends him. Starring Ralph Fiennes, Juliette Binoche, Willem Dafoe, Kristin Scott Thomas, Naveen Andrews, and Colin Firth. Opening Nov. 15.

The Mirror Has Two Faces—Barbra Streisand directed and stars with Jeff Bridges in a comedy about two romantically challenged college professors in New York City. With Lauren Bacall. Written by Richard LaGravenese. Opening Nov. 15. (Chelsea Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

Space Jam—Michael Jordan shares top billing with Bugs Bunny in this part-animated, part-live-action comedy about basketball in outer space. Directed by Joe Pytka. Written by Leo Benvenuti, Steve Rudnick, Timothy Harris, and Herschel Weingrod. Opening Nov. 15. (Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 34.)

Basquiat—Making his début as a movie director, the painter Julian Schnabel offers a fond portrait of his fellow-artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (Jeffrey Wright), who died in 1988 from a heroin overdose. It isn't hard to read his career as a cautionary New York tale; the movie, however, is helplessly in love with him, and Schnabel never dreams of questioning his art. The film is best viewed as a freakish social comedy, its levity assured by a fine cast: the sweet-natured Wright, Benicio Del Toro (forever strange) as Basquiat's best friend, and a suitably zonked David Bowie as Andy Warhol.—A.L. *(8/19/96)* (Angelika 57 and The Screening Room.)

Beautiful Thing—An urban fairy tale, set in London, about first love between two sixteen-year-old boys (Glen Berry and Scott Neal). The movie is a mixed bag, but it has sweet performances and some wonderful moments; the director, Hettie Macdonald, films through rose-colored glasses that capture the humor and charm of the story but not the drama.—B.D. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Big Night—The actor Stanley Tucci co-wrote (with Joseph Tropiano), co-directed (with Campbell Scott), and co-stars (with Tony Shalhoub) in this elegant, leisurely low-budget comedy about a struggling Italian restaurant run by a pair of immigrant brothers. The unusually happy, relaxed ensemble includes Ian Holm, Isabella Rossellini, Minnie Driver, Allison Janney, and Campbell Scott. The big set piece—a lavish dinner in honor of the singer-bandleader Louis Prima—is a fitting climax to the movie's patient accumulation of savory and blissfully pointless delights: a convincing illustration of how keen pleasure for pleasure's sake can be.—T.R. (9/23/96) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

Breathing Room—Director Jon Sherman's romantic comedy (which he co-wrote with Tom Hughes) about a New York City couple (Susan Floyd and Dan Futterman) who decide to spend some time apart. (Angelika Film Center.)

The Chamber—Just a few months after this summer's senseless hit "A Time to Kill," another bloated John Grisham legal thriller gets the overblown, overacted Hollywood treatment. In this one, Chris O'Donnell stars as a vain young attorney determined to save his grandfather (Gene Hackman), a redneck K.K.K. murderer, from execution. While O'Donnell does his Tom Cruise best to appear serious and engaged, Hackman turns in one of his rare histrionic and unconvincing performances. James Foley's directorial style *demands* attention—the film flails all over the place in an attempt to appear tense and authoritative—but the plot never takes hold. This is generic made-for-TV fodder (racism is bad, it's wrong to take a life) dressed up like a smart, sassy lawyer: expensively.—B.D. (National Twin and Park & 86th Street Cinemas.)

Dear God—After co-starring in last year's forgettable "Sabrina," Greg Kinnear gets another chance to shine in this cluttered comedy. He plays a rakish con man who, after being apprehended, is put to work doing community service at a post office, where he answers the letters of people who have written to God. The real miracle here is that the mawkish Frank Capra premise doesn't flatten out the hipness of either Kinnear (who has the sexy, self-satisfied charm of the early Bruce Willis) or his fellow-performers (Hector Elizondo, Laurie Metcalf, and a brilliant Tim Conway among them)—a cast almost worthy of Preston Sturges. The picture suffers from bad editing and poor pacing, but the director, Garry Marshall, still gets a few laughs going; he throws a lot away, but his sloppiness is actually quite breezy.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, State, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Everything Relative—Six gay women who were college friends in the seventies reunite for a weekend, in a comedy/drama written and directed by Sharon Pollack. (Quad Cinema.)

The First Wives Club—Goldie Hawn, Bette Midler, and Diane Keaton, three of America's finest comic actresses, get together for the first time, and the best that Hollywood has to offer them is this loud empowerment comedy. The premise—old friends meet at a funeral and find that they have something in common: their husbands are leaving them for younger women—sounds like a fair taking-off point for some wicked comedy. But all that the scenarist, Robert Harling, can think of to follow it up with is a tepid revenge fantasy in which they bond and dole out justice to their cheating men. The director, Hugh Wilson, aims for harmless froth, and what he winds up with, as the hysteria level rises, is something brash and strident.—B.D. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 4, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and 72nd Street East.)

The Funeral—Abel Ferrara directs Chris Penn, Christopher Walken, Vincent Gallo, Benicio Del Toro, Annabella Sciorra, and Isabella Rossellini in a drama about an Italian-American family in Depression-era New York. (Angelika Film Center and 84th Street Sixplex.)

Get On the Bus—Spike Lee rushed to get an homage to last year's Million Man March ready in time for the first anniversary of the event, and the result feels—well, "rushed" would be putting it mildly. The story follows a group of African-American men on a march-bound bus from Los Angeles to Washington. The obvious point is their diversity, but the

Participating Authors (list in formation) • Diane Ackerman • Stephen Ambrose • Martin Amis • James Atlas • Lauren Bacall • Nicholson Baker • Dave Barry • Louis Begley • John Berendt • Scott Berg • Daniel J. Boorstin • Patricia Bosworth • Barbara Taylor Bradford • Jimmy Breslin • Christopher Buckley • A.S. Byatt • Robert Caro • Susan Cheever • Deepak Chopra • Mary Higgins Clark • Michael Crichton • Mario Cuomo • Clive Cussler • Frank Deford • E.L. Doctorow • Dominick Dunne • Bret Easton Ellis • James Ellroy • Nora Ephron • Clarissa Pinkola Estes • Ken Follett • Richard Ford • Marshall Frady • Paul Fussell • John Kenneth Galbraith • Henry Louis Gates, Jr. • Ellen Gilchrist • Brendan Gill • Nikki Giovanni • Stephen Jay Gould • Francine du Plessix Gray • John Guare • A.R. Gurney • David Halberstam • Philip Hamburger • Pete Hamill • Joseph Heller • Carl Hiaasen • George Higgins • Jules Feiffer • A.E. Hotchner • Philip Howard • Tama Janowitz • Mary Karr • Barbara Kingsolver • Maxine Hong Kingston • Jesse Kornbluth • Harold S. Kushner • John Lahr • Norman Mailer • Steve Martini • Christopher Mason • Armistead Maupin • Gita Mehta • Lorrie Moore • Mary Tyler Moore • Michael Moore • Peggy Noonan • Joyce Carol Oates • George Plimpton • Anna Quindlen • Richard Rhodes • Lillian Ross • Joan Ryan • William Safire • Carolyn See • Neil Sheehan • Gail Sheehy • Anita Shreve • Dr. Spock • James Stewart • William Styron • Calvin Trillin • John Updike • Tobias Wolff • Bob Woodward •

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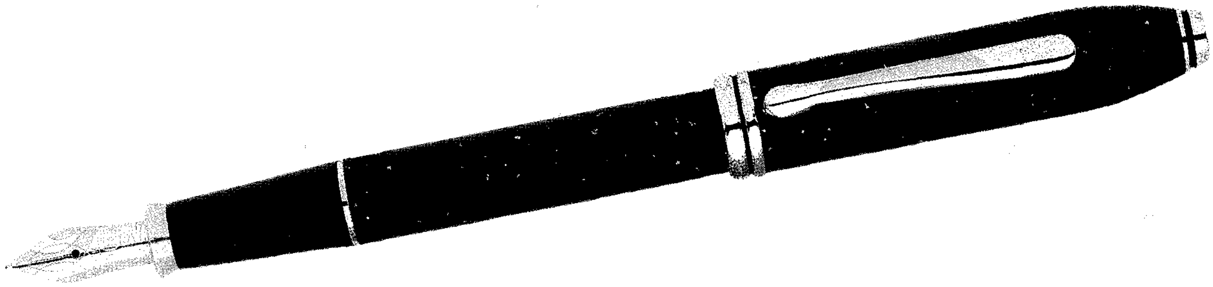

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CROSS® FINE WRITING INSTRUMENTS and THE NEW YORKER present Letters for Literacy only way that the screenwriter, Reggie Rock Bythewood, can think of to demonstrate it is with clichés (Ossie Davis playing his usual wise old codger) alongside anti-clichés (Isaiah Washington as a gay Gulf War veteran) that feel just as stereotyped.—S.K. (Criterion Center and 84th Street Sixplex.)

The Ghost and the Darkness—Michael Douglas, who produced, has hideously miscast himself as a great white hunter in director Stephen Hopkins's attempt at an African adventure. The screenplay, about two lions that have been devouring the African workers at a British bridge-building camp in late-nineteenth-century Kenya, was written by William Goldman in a style reminiscent of such great colonial trash epics of the fifties as “Elephant Walk” and “The Rains of Ranchipur.” But all that Douglas can think of to do while the mystical declamation and the body count both soar is swagger around like Iron John. It doesn't help that he's teamed with Val Kilmer, who, as the bridge's chief architect, faces danger with an upper lip as stiff as Stewart Granger's. Mediocre camerawork and flashy editing combine to spoil any thrill of the hunt; the fake environment of “Jurassic Park” invited greater curiosity.—B.D. (Astor Plaza, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

High School High—A daft new comedy from David Zucker—or, as he is referred to in the opening credits, “the producer formerly known as David Zucker.” The target this time is not disaster flicks or cop sagas but soppy educational dramas such as “Dangerous Minds,” which are basically asking for it. Jon Lovitz plays a shy, well-meaning history teacher who takes a post at Marion Barry High, the sort of establishment where the principal whacks pupils with a baseball bat. In the first half hour, the gags fly so densely that you don't know where to look; thereafter, as director Hart Bochner realizes that he'd better think about a plot, the film dies down a little. The main reason to stay with it is Jon Lovitz, who trades his standard cynicism for something more charitable (“Smell those seats,” he says nostalgically on entering a classroom) but still manages to remain deeply unbothered by the chaos around him. Considering that the movie wrings all its laughs out of an insoluble crisis in education, it's pretty funny. With Mekhi Phifer, Louise Fletcher, and, of course, Tia Carrere, who seems to have taken over where the late Dorothy Lamour left off.—A.L. (11/11/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . . ¶ 64th and 2nd; through Nov. 14.)

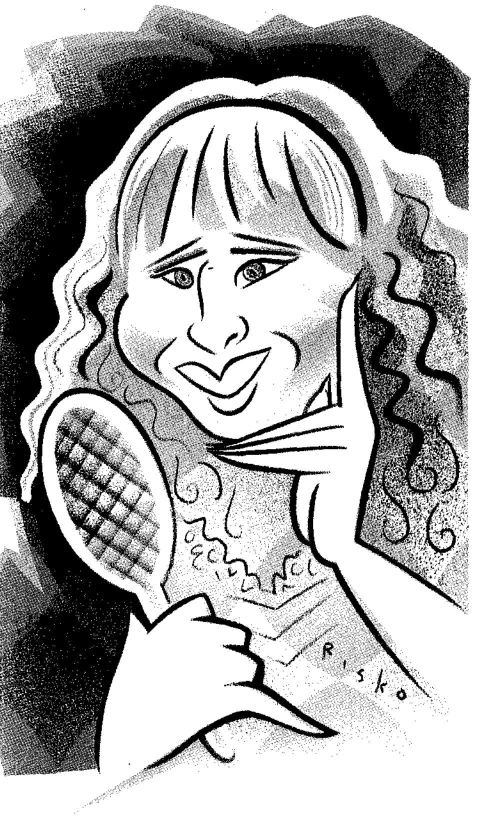
Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent—Bob Hoskins and Patricia Arquette star in Christopher Hampton's adaptation of Conrad's 1907 novel, about a plot to blow up the Greenwich Park observatory in London. With Gérard Depardieu. (Gotham Cinema, 62nd & Broadway, and Waverly.)

Jude—An adaptation of Thomas Hardy's “Jude the Obscure,” written by Hossein Amini and directed by Michael Winterbottom, with Christopher Eccleston in the title role. The movie is remarkably true to the darkness and chafing disgust of the novel, and that fidelity is where the problem lies. Jude, the stonemason who dreams of becoming a scholar, is mired in failure from the start; even as you respect the picture for its earth-toned palette and its bestial pain, you know that any dramatic momentum will lead nowhere. There is much to admire here, almost nothing to enjoy. Also starring Kate Winslet.—A.L. (Cinema 3.)

Larger Than Life—A comedy written by Roy Blount, Jr., and directed by Howard Franklin, featuring Bill Murray and a four-ton elephant on a cross-country trip. With Janeane Garofalo and Matthew McConaughey. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and Waverly.)

The Long Kiss Goodnight—After the disaster of “Cutthroat Island,” Geena Davis and her husband, director Renny Harlin, have teamed up again for what they intend as a coolly slam-bang action movie, but it's a leaden affair. Davis plays an amnesiac schoolteacher who gradually realizes that she's been trained as a spy; she is partnered by the ever reliable Samuel L. Jackson, who, as a private eye, gives the dumb proceedings some badly needed playfulness.—B.D. (Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village East Cinemas.)

Looking for Richard—A movie that combines filmed segments of “Richard III” with a documentary about their making. Directed by and starring Al Pacino, who co-wrote the narration with Frederic Kimball. Pacino, Alec Baldwin, Kevin Spacey, and Winona Ryder are in the cast of the play; in addition, there are interviews with Kenneth Branagh, John Gielgud, Vanessa Redgrave, and others. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)



Barbra Streisand, director and star of “The Mirror Has Two Faces.”

ROBERT RISKO

Mad Dog Time—Richard Dreyfuss plays a Mafia boss fresh out of an insane asylum, in a black comedy written and directed by Larry Bishop. (Baronet, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Michael Collins—The short life and lasting legend of the Irish freedom fighter Michael Collins (1890-1922), compressed into a vigorous movie by the writer and director Neil Jordan. Liam Neeson gives a hefty performance as the hero, but the film takes too much care insuring that we like and admire him, cooling the figure's hot temper and ignoring any sins of the flesh (let alone of the spirit) which he committed—he remains devoted to Kitty Kiernan (Julia Roberts). The strength of the movie resides mainly in the work of its cameraman, Chris Menges, who delivers a barrage of images as rousing and changeable as the fortunes of Collins himself. With Aidan Quinn and Stephen Rea.—A.L. (10/14/96) (Beekman, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas.)

Microcosmos—A revelatory documentary about insects. The directors, Claude Nuridsany and Marie Pérennou, who were trained as biologists, spent years designing cameras that would capture spiders, butterflies, beetles, and bees in their habitats as never before. There are no voice-overs, just closeups of bugs; a few sequences surpass the most horrific science fiction, but a surprising number of the creatures are quite cute. The inventive, funny-ethereal score is by Bruno Coulais.—S.K. (Film Forum 3.)

Mother Night—Keith Gordon's adaptation of an early (1961) Kurt Vonnegut novel is always engrossing but never especially persuasive. The hero is a forlorn man named Howard W. Campbell, Jr. (Nick Nolte)—an American writer, living in Germany in the thirties, who is recruited to spy for American intelligence. His wartime reports are encoded in weekly propaganda broadcasts, in which he smoothly explicates the anti-Semitic policies of the Third Reich; after the war, he goes into hiding and broods over the possibility that his broadcasts may have done more harm than good. The story attempts to investigate the paradox of acting, but Vonnegut's theme—“We are what we pretend to be”—gets muddled in the movie, in part through the miscasting of the central role. Although Nolte gives a fine, intelligent performance, he's too straightforward an actor to convey the slipperiness of a man-without-qualities figure like Campbell. Also with Alan Arkin, Sheryl Lee, and John Goodman.—T.R. (11/4/96) (Cinema II and Village East Cinemas.)

Palookaville—Three friends (Adam Trese, Vincent Gallo, and William Forsythe) try to escape their small-town lives by turning to crime, in a comedy directed by Alan Taylor. Written by David Epstein. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

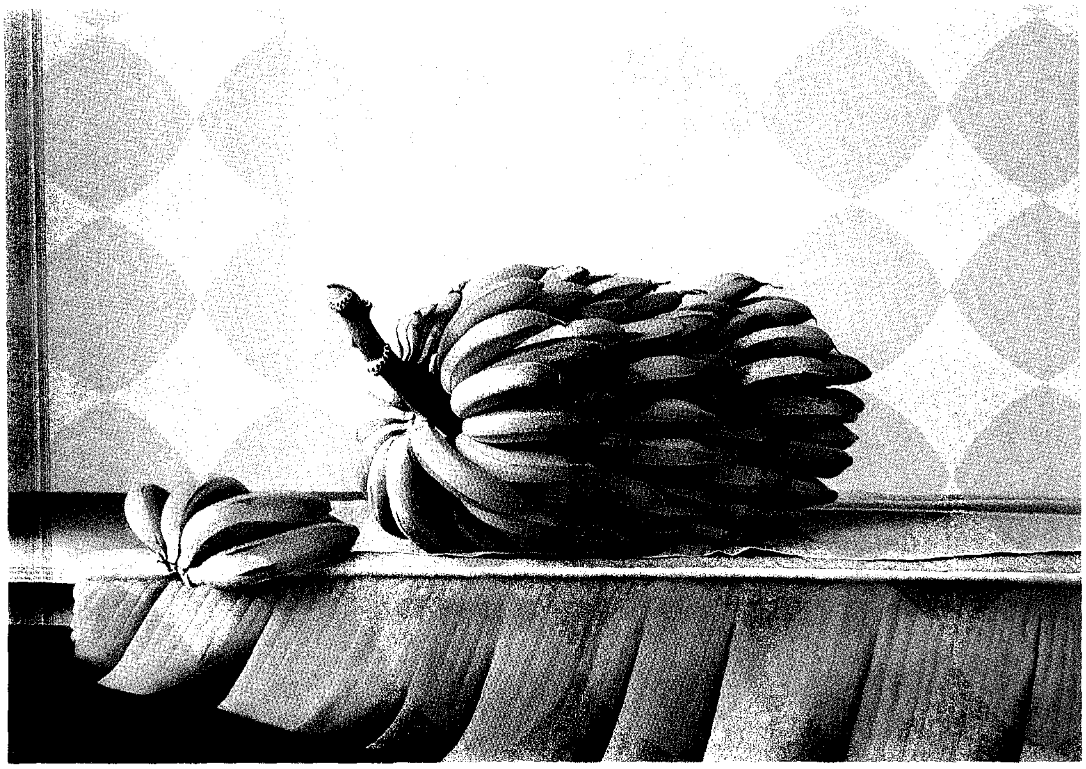
Paris Was a Woman—Greta Schiller's portrait of the female artists and intellectuals who gave nineteen-twenties Paris its flair. Written by Andrea Weiss. (Quad Cinema.)

The Proprietor—Jeanne Moreau has the role of a French writer who, after three decades in New York, decides to return to Paris, in a drama directed by Ismail Merchant. With Austin Pendleton, Nell Carter, and Pierre Vaneck. Written by Jean-Marie Besset and George Trow. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas.)

Ransom—Mel Gibson looks great, as sleek as the cocky young man he played in “The Year of Living Dangerously.” But that is the only finesse on view in Ron Howard's grinding new picture, which could have been a snappy little hostage thriller but which decided, somewhere along the way, to take itself terribly seriously. Gibson plays Tom Mullen, the wealthy owner of an airline, whose young son (Brawley Nolte) is kidnapped by a gang of good-for-nothings. No one in this movie, to be honest, is good for anything: Rene Russo suffers from a woefully underpowered role as Tom's wife, Gary Sinise struggles to convince us that he has the makings of a scuzzy villain, and Gibson himself has to stand there and act tragic in closeup. The plot demands that Tom call the bad guys' bluff and refuse to pay the ransom, preferring to act tough and put a price on their heads. But the film's pretenses of toughness are a joke, and Howard's appropriation of a dirty style—coarsely grained images that descend climactically into black and white—reminds you of a happy young kid trying his first cigarette.—A.L. (11/11/96) (84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 1, Guild, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas.)

Secrets & Lies—Hortense (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), the heroine of Mike Leigh's broadest and most ambitious film to date, decides after the death of her adoptive mother to seek her biological one. The quest turns up Cynthia (Brenda Blethyn), who freaks out: Hortense is middle-class and black, Cynthia working-class and white. Jean-Baptiste gives a quiet, pacific performance; Blethyn deals in spasms of exaggeration which belong in another film altogether. Still, there is a fine supporting cast, and they all gather in the final scene, a cathartic barbecue that starts off as nicely choreographed light comedy and

A VISUAL FEAST



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darkens to a Bergman-like chorus of wailing women and slightly overcooked dialogue.—A.L. (Angelika Film Center, Eastside Playhouse, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Set It Off—Jada Pinkett, Queen Latifah, Vivica A. Fox, and Kimberly Elise are Los Angeles bank robbers, in a thriller directed by F. Gary Gray. Written by Takashi Bufford and Kate Lanier. (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Sleepers—Barry Levinson's movie is a doggedly faithful adaptation of Lorenzo Carcaterra's 1995 best-seller, which purported to be a memoir of the author's youth in Hell's Kitchen, his horrifying experiences in an upstate reformatory, and his participation, years later, in an elaborate scheme to avenge the abuses that he and his friends suffered at the hands of the reform school's sadistic guards. The book quickly aroused suspicion that it was a hoax, and the film does nothing to dispel the aura of fishiness. Under Levinson's scrupulous, unimaginative direction, the picture plays as a thoroughly old-fashioned Hollywood crime melodrama, loaded with tough-guy clichés and constructed, very neatly, in three distinct acts. Most viewers have no trouble believing that truth is stranger than fiction: the problem with this "true" story is that it's *exactly* as strange as fiction, and in exactly the same way. With Jason Patric, Brad Pitt, Robert De Niro, Kevin Bacon, Minnie Driver, Vittorio Gassman, Frank Medrano, and Dustin Hoffman.—T.R. (11/4/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Stephen King's Thinner—An overweight attorney (Robert John Burke) falls under a Gypsy's curse and begins losing weight, in a film directed by Tom Holland and written by Michael McDowell, from the 1984 novel by King (writing as Richard Bachman). (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 2, First & 62nd Cinemas, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Swingers—A funny, boys-on-the-town ode to friendship and cruising for girls. The writer, Jon Favreau, co-stars with Vince Vaughn, a handsome new actor, and they're hilarious—but the film isn't a bubbleheaded comedy. The director, Doug Liman, follows his characters through swinging-singles hangouts from Hollywood to Vegas with a neon-soaked camera; beneath all the hip talk and the funny predicaments, his two heroes are wistful, stargazing romantics.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center, Cinema I, and 84th Street Sixplex.)

Trees Lounge—One of the stars of independent film, Steve Buscemi, now gets to write, direct, and star in his own project, an aimless and amiable look into the lives of people who gather inside a Long Island bar. The movie suggests John Cassavetes minus the hysteria—there are no epiphanies. Buscemi's simply drawn characters, who accept their fates with little fuss, are actors' dreams; Mark Boone Junior as a bored and irritable married friend, and Chloe Sevigny, as a sexy teen-ager, are particularly good. As a screwed-up sot, Buscemi moves in an inebriated haze, but his writing and direction are exceptionally clearheaded.—B.D. (Village Theatre VII.)

Twelfth Night—Trevor Nunn's version of Shakespeare's comedy, featuring Helena Bonham Carter, Richard E. Grant, Nigel Hawthorne, and Ben Kingsley. (Regency and Village East Cinemas.)

Unhook the Stars—A drama co-written (with Helen Caldwell) and directed by Nick Cassavetes, starring Gena Rowlands as a suburban widow whose children have grown up and left home. With Marisa Tomei and Gérard Depardieu. (Lincoln Square and 68th St. Playhouse.)

William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet—Leonardo DiCaprio represents the Montagues and Claire Danes the Capulets in Baz Luhrmann's version of the tragedy. With John Leguizamo, Paul Sorvino, and Brian Dennehy. Screenplay by the director and Craig Pearce. (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet, Lincoln Square, National Twin, Orpheum VII, and 34th St. East.)

ALSO PLAYING

THE ASSOCIATE: Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 3, and Orpheum VII. . . . **BAD MOON:** Criterion Center. . . . **BOUND:** Art Greenwich Twin. . . . **CHAMPAGNE SAFARI:** Cinema Village. . . . **THE FAN:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **FLY AWAY HOME** (reviewed in our issue of 9/16/96): Lincoln Square and Park & 86th Street Cinemas. . . . **THE GARDEN OF THE FINZI-CONTINIS:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE GLIMMER MAN:** Criterion Center. . . . **GRACE OF MY HEART:** 59th Street East Cinemas. . . . **HYPE!:** Village Theatre VII. . . . **INDEPENDENCE DAY** (7/15/96): Manhattan Twin and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **SHE'S THE ONE** (9/9/96): 59th Street East Cinema. . . . **THE SPITFIRE GRILL** (9/9/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **SURVIVING PICASSO:** Paris and Village Theatre VII. . . . **THREE LIVES AND ONLY ONE DEATH:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **A TIME TO KILL** (7/29/96): Manhattan Twin and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **TIN CUP** (8/12/96): Manhattan Twin and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **TRAINSPOTTING** (7/22/96): The Screening Room. . . . **A VERY BRADY SEQUEL:** Worldwide Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Baronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy I, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema I and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton I and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly I and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

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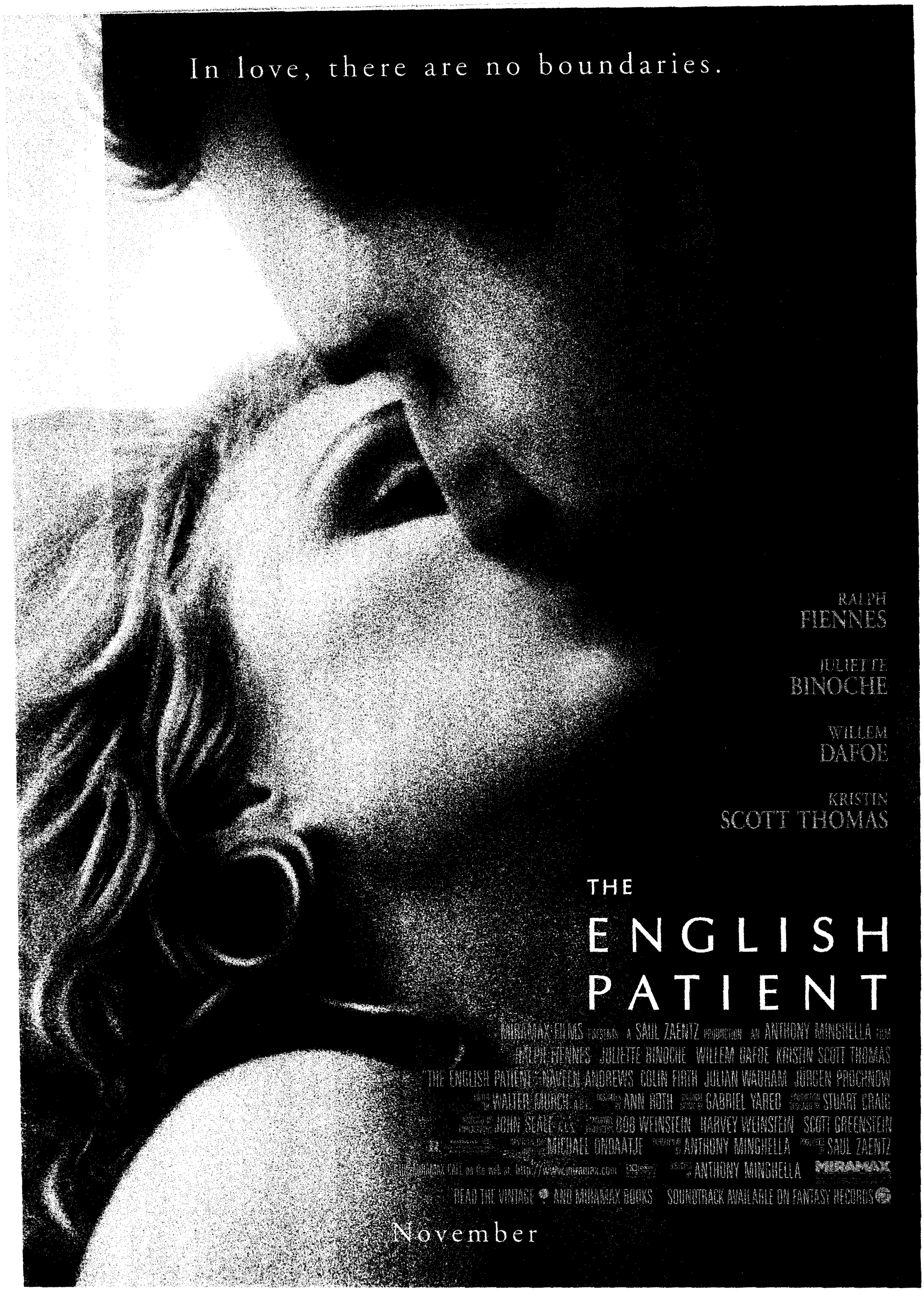
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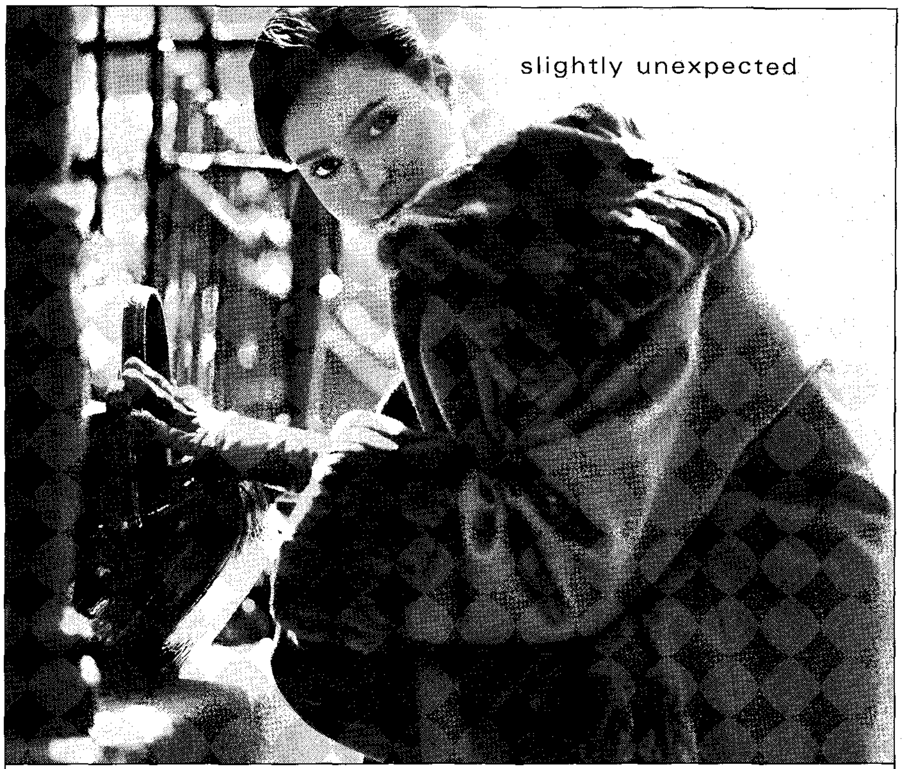

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REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

The Hitch-Hiker (1953)—The director, Ida Lupino, minted a new piece of American horror mythology when she made this torn-from-the-headlines suspense film about two friends on a fishing-and-hunting trip (Frank Lovejoy and Edmond O'Brien) who pick up a notorious murderer (William Talman). Lupino exploits the premise in workmanlike fashion, but, apart from one or two inventive sequences (especially a modified William Tell number, in which Lovejoy is forced to shoot a can out of O'Brien's hand), what gives the film its lowdown charge is the sour doggedness that Talman brings to the killer. With a bad eye that won't shut when he sleeps—and from certain angles makes him resemble Batman's grody foe Two-Face—he's a never-ending nightmare.—M.S. (American Museum of the Moving Image; Nov. 17.)

Outrageous! (1977)—Craig Russell brings a redemptive witty flair to the role of a Toronto drag artist who befriends a schizophrenic girl (Hollis McLaren). His onstage impersonations are both funny and generous: his Judy Garland is in control of herself, as if all her nervous flutterings are deliberate; his Streisand is cherubically silly. And the show-biz story has a funny twist that gives an edge to the poignance—if Russell is the nascent gay star, McLaren is his stage mother. The movie's everyone-is-crazy assumptions are like R. D. Laing married to Frank Capra, but McLaren's rippling-mercury expressions and line readings salvage lyrical gems from be-yourself doggerel: when a doctor asks McLaren if she sleeps with Russell, she says, "We sleep in different worlds." Richard Benner wrote and directed.—M.S. (A Different Light Bookstore; Nov. 17.)

The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928)—One of the greatest of all movies. The director, Carl Dreyer, based the script on the trial records, and the testimony appears to be given for the first time. As the five gruelling cross-examinations follow each other, Dreyer turns the camera on the faces of Joan and the judges, and in giant closeups he reveals his interpretation of their emotions. In this enlargement Joan and her persecutors are shockingly fleshly—isolated with their sweat, warts, spittle, and tears, and (as no one used makeup) with startlingly individual contours, features, and skin. No other film has so subtly linked eroticism with religious persecution. Falconetti's Joan may be the finest performance ever recorded on film. The staging, and the cinematography by Rudolph Maté, are in a style that suggests the Stations of the Cross. The film is silent, but as you often see the (French) words forming you may have the illusion that you've heard them.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; Nov. 16 and Nov. 19.)

Tales of Ordinary Madness (1983)—Not for people who are disturbed by four-letter words or sexual acts performed with lewd gusto. Made in English by the Italian director Marco Ferreri, it's about many of the same themes as an Ingmar Bergman picture, but it isn't stark—it has the matter-of-fact, one-thing-after-another plainness of an Abbott and Costello movie. The script is based on the stories and the spirit of the American poet and novelist Charles Bukowski, a master of rut who writes about the gutbucket pain and elation of being human. The artist-bum hero, who is based in L.A., is played by Ben Gazzara, who gets to cut loose and do things that probably nobody has done onscreen before. Ferreri gets right down inside Bukowski's self-mocking lust and self-dramatizing temperament. As the convent-bred prostitute, Cass, "the most beautiful woman in town," Ornella Muti is as lithe as a cat, and has the soft radiance of the young Hedy Lamarr in the coital scenes of "Ecstasy." The early sequences don't have much impetus and the dialogue is often flatulent, but there's genuine audacity and risk-taking in this movie. It may not have the energy of great art, but its nakedness has an aesthetic force.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; Nov. 15-16.)

Vertigo—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Ziegfeld; through Nov. 14. . . . ¶ Chelsea Cinemas; starting Nov. 15.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Films directed by Marco Ferreri. Through Nov. 14: "Bye Bye Monkey" (1978). . . . Nov. 15-16: "Tales of Ordinary Madness" (†). . . . Nov. 17: "Chiedo Asilo" (1979). . . . Nov. 19-20: "Don't Touch the White Woman!" (1974). . . . ¶ Nov. 18: "Sally, Irene & Mary" (1925, Edmund Goulding; silent) and "Lights of Old Broadway" (1925, Monta Bell; silent).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films written by, directed by, or starring Jean-Pierre Melville, and three American films he admired. Nov. 14 at 2:30: "Dirty Money" (1972, in French). . . . Nov. 14 at 6 and Nov. 15 at 2:30: "Army of Shadows" (1969, in French). . . . Nov. 15 at 6: "The Godson" (1967, in French). . . . Nov. 16 at 2 and Nov. 17 at 5: "Odds Against Tomorrow" (1959, Robert Wise). . . . Nov. 16 at 5: "Magnet of Doom" (1962, in French). . . . Nov. 17 at 2: "Breathless" (1959, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). . . . Nov. 18 at 2:30: "The Best Years of Our Lives" (1946, William Wyler). . . . Nov. 18 at 6 and Nov. 19 at 2:30: "The Asphalt Jungle" (1950, John Huston). . . . ¶ Nov. 14 at 3 and 6: "The Gringo in Mañanaland" (1995, DeeDee Halleck). . . . ¶ Nov. 15 at 3 and Nov. 17 at 2:30: "Painters Painting" (1972, Emile de Antonio). . . . ¶ Nov. 15 at 6 and Nov. 16 at 5: Short European avant-garde films from 1928, by such artists as Germaine Dulac and Man Ray. . . . ¶ Nov. 16 at 2:30 and Nov. 19 at 6: "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (†). . . . ¶ Nov. 17 at 5 and Nov. 19 at 3: "Cinema on the Road: A Personal Essay on Cinema in Korea" (1995, Jong Sun-Woo).

At Film Forum 2, Ben Gazzara in "Tales of Ordinary Madness."

JARRETT HUDDLESTON

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Dec. 5: A program of films from Arab countries. . . . ¶ Weekend showings for children. Nov. 16-17 at 2: "Godzilla 1985" (1985, Kohji Hashimoto).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—A program of films starring Charles Aznavour. Nov. 13 at 12:30 and 6:30: "Paris in the Month of August" (1965, Pierre Granier-Deferre; in French, with no English subtitles). . . . Nov. 13 at 3:30 and 9: "Les Intrus" (1971, Sergio Gobbi; in French, with no English subtitles). . . . Nov. 18 at 12:30 and 7:30: "Tomorrow Is My Turn" (1960, André Cayatte; in French). . . . Nov. 18 at 3:30 and 9:45: "Sky Riders" (1976, Douglas Hickox). . . . Nov. 19 at 12:30 and 6:30: "Un Taxi pour Tobrouk" (1961, Denys de la Patellière; in French). . . . Nov. 19 at 3:30 and 9: "The Tin Drum" (1979, Volker Schlöndorff; in German).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by, or starring, Ida Lupino. Nov. 17 at 2: "The Hitch-Hiker" (†). . . . Nov. 17 at 4:30: "High Sierra" (1941, Raoul Walsh).

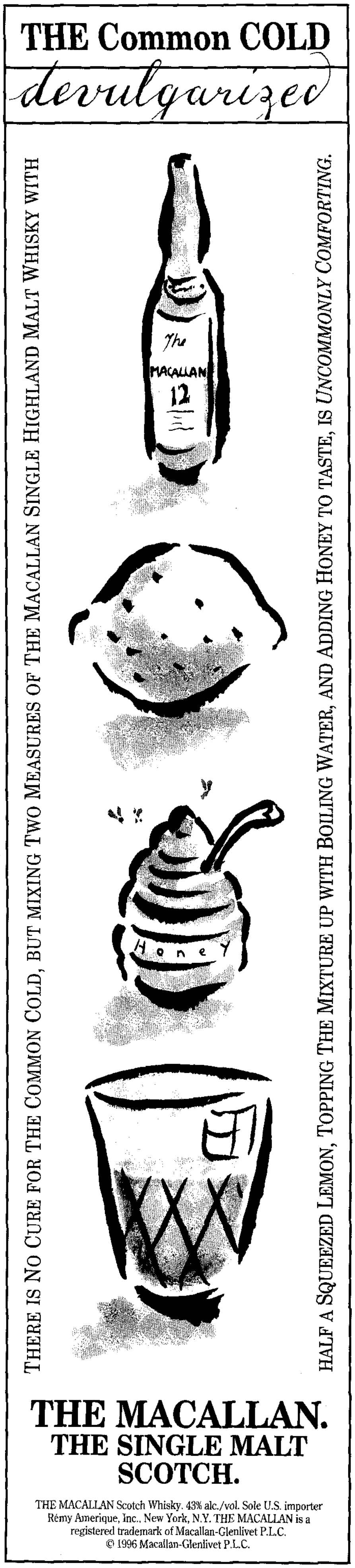
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—Nov. 19 at 7: "Rebecca" (1940, Alfred Hitchcock). . . . Nov. 19 at 9:30: "The Piano" (1993, Jane Campion).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Nov. 17 at 7, the feature will be "Outrageous!" (†).

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—Nov. 15-21: A program of seven new Italian films, including "The Second Time," directed by Mimmo Caolopresti. All films in Italian, with English subtitles.

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.—The 13th Annual Israel Film Festival, Nov. 13-26 (except Fridays), will screen feature, documentary, and short films. Among those being shown are "Lovesick on Nana Street," directed by Savi Gabizon, and "Yasmine," directed by Nizar Hassan. (For information about other titles and schedules, call 957-0951.)

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—Nov. 13 at 6: "Modigliani" (1958, Jacques Becker; in French). . . . ¶ Nov. 13 at 7 and 9:30: "Wings of Desire" (1987, Wim Wenders; in German). . . . ¶ Nov. 13-14 at 8: A program of short films by African-American filmmakers. . . . ¶ Nov. 13-14 at 10: "Saturday Night Fever" (1978, John Badham). . . . ¶ Nov. 14 at 6: "Superstar: The Life and Times of Andy Warhol" (1991, Chuck Workman). . . . ¶ Nov. 14 at 7: "The Travelling Players" (1975, Theo Angelopoulos; in Greek). . . . ¶ Nov. 15 at 7, Nov. 16-17 at 4 and 7, and Nov. 18-19 at 7: "Up/Down/Fragile" (1995, Jacques Rivette; in French). . . . ¶ Nov. 15 at 8 and 10: "The Society of the Spectacle" (1973, Guy Debord). . . . ¶ Nov. 15-19 at 9:45: "Pulp Fiction" (1994, Quentin Tarantino). . . . ¶ Nov. 16 at 4 and 6: "Can Dialectics Break Bricks?" (1973, René Viénet and Gerard Cohen). . . . ¶ Nov. 17 at 4 and 6: "Venom and Eternity" (1951, Jean Isidore Isou). . . . ¶ Nov. 19 at 6 and 9: "Rocco and His Brothers" (1960, Luchino Visconti; in Italian).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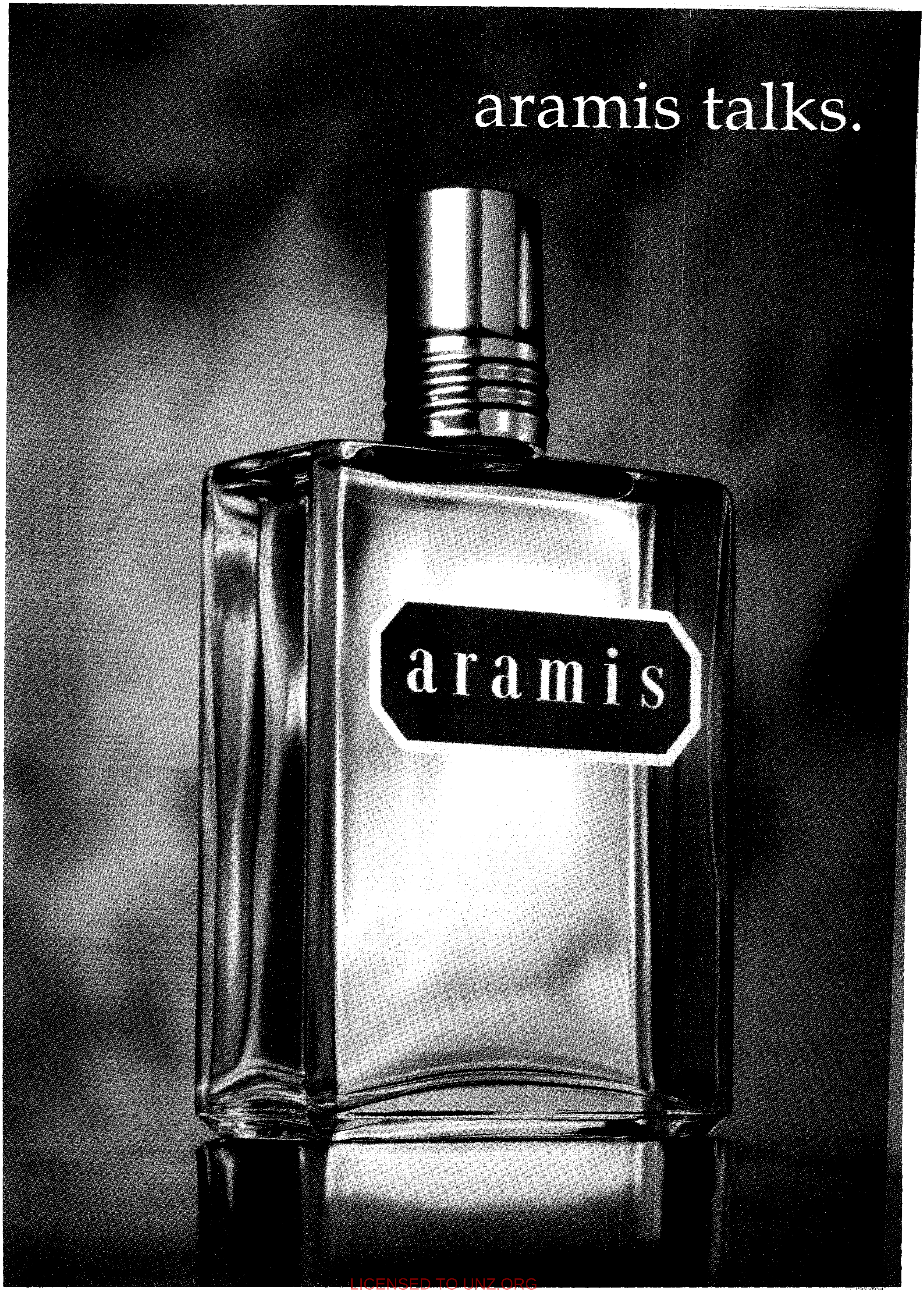
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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

THE VITAL CENTER

THE day after the votes were counted, Charles Murray sat down for lunch in a corner of the executive dining room at the American Enterprise Institute, in Washington, D.C., ordered sautéed scallops and a charbroiled filet of halibut, and pronounced the whole business of the previous day beside the point. Americans may have been voting as to what kind of government they wanted, but to Murray the better question was whether Americans should want much of a government at all. "Most people in the United States are already living lives where they could do without the government just fine," he said, thereby reminding all the other wonkish, inside-the-Beltway power types that he was definitely *not* one of them.

The man who twelve years ago set the intellectual world on edge with "Losing Ground," his denunciation of the welfare state, and two years ago did it again with "The Bell Curve," his intemperate examination of the links between race and I.Q., has now gone one better. Murray has outed himself as a Libertarian, and in a new book, "What It Means to Be a Libertarian," scheduled for publication in January, he lays out a vision of government which is to mainstream conservatism what the bikini is to thermal underwear. No Medicare. No Social Security. No welfare. No business, civil-rights, or food-and-drug regulations. No HUD, no Agriculture Department, no Post Office. Just a Defense Department on the bottom and a skimpy three-thousand-dollar-per-schoolchild educational subsidy across the top.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Of course, Charles Murray isn't your usual Libertarian—the sort who refuses, on principle, to get a driver's license and who has committed large chunks of Ayn Rand to memory. An entirely normal-appearing, graying, fiftyish father of four, dressed in a gray suit with a paisley tie and a blue pin-striped shirt, he is a contrarian Libertarian—a Libertarian who believes that to be a Libertarian isn't contrarian at all.

Get rid of forty per cent of the federal government? So *what*, Murray said: "If a wand were waved, and we had no Medicare or Medicaid or any of the other things I want to do away with, the thing you have to realize is that in most respects you're looking at the U.S. as it was in 1960. This is not the dark ages. The U.S. in 1960 wasn't some evil place. It *worked*." Murray was past the scallops and halibut now, and was thoughtfully dissecting a poached pear. "It would be like the emperor's new clothes," he continued. "You'd get large numbers of people who'd realize we don't need it—the government can go away, and who cares." How did Murray vote? "This falls into the category of questions I don't want to answer," he said. He laughed nervously and then covered his eyes, because at this point the task of setting himself apart from whatever group he was in danger of belonging to was getting a little dizzying. "I voted for Dole, because my wife said if you want to vote against Bill Clinton you have to vote for Dole," he explained. "But that has nothing to do with Dole's policies. If I hadn't voted for Dole, I would have voted for Harry Browne"—the Libertarian Party candidate. With that he was off again. "The way we conduct voter-registration campaigns is *all* wrong," he began.

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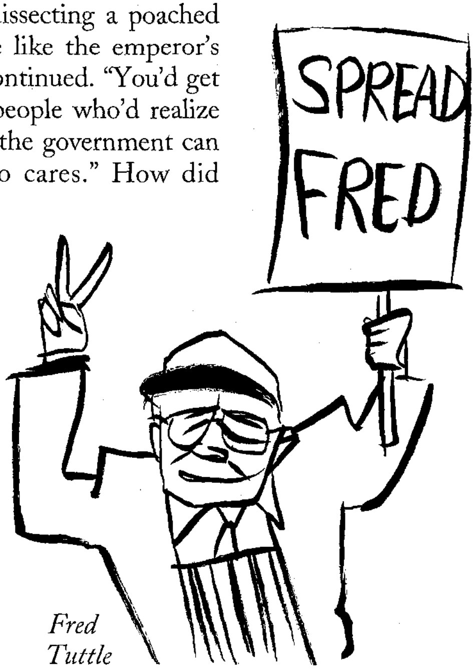

Fred Tuttle

THAT morning, John O'Brien, a successful Democratic candidate for justice of the peace in the town of Tunbridge, Vermont (pop. 1,200), took stock. Without actually having mounted a campaign—no advertising, no lawn signs, no budget—he had won a second two-year term. Without the benefit of exit-polling, he had a concise explanation for his victory: "I was swept into office on Fred Tuttle's coattails." Fred Tuttle, as it happens, is a retired seventy-seven-year-old Tunbridge dairy farmer and the hero of "Man with a Plan," a film that recently opened in New York and eleven other cities. A droll, deliberately featherweight ninety minutes of political satire, "Man with a Plan" is the mock-documentary chronicle of a retired dairy farmer named Fred Tuttle, a tenth-grade dropout with unscriptable diction and a Yankee inflection thicker than cream, who realizes that the surest way to pay his overdue tax bill and finance a hip operation for his ninety-four-year-old father is to run for Congress, a job that requires no previous experience or qualifications and pays a hundred and twenty-nine thousand five hundred dollars a year. (Party affiliation: Regressive; campaign slogan: "Why Not?"; platform: FRED, the acronym for "Friendly, Renewable, Extraterrestrial, Dinky.") The film's director—also its writer, producer, co-cameraman, editor, and distributor—is John O'Brien.

Last winter, "Man with a Plan" began playing in several New England cities—during a ten-week run in Burlington it outgrossed "Sense and Sensibility"—and, more or less overnight, Fred Tuttle became a cultural icon. Bumper stickers inspired by the film proliferated throughout Vermont, along with the notion that a write-in vote for Fred Tuttle would constitute a judicious political statement.

Tuttle collected forty write-in votes in Tunbridge, two for President. O'Brien believes Tuttle might have done even better if he hadn't offended a few voters by temporarily and inadvertently backing both the leading candidates for Vermont's sole congressional seat, the incumbent Independent/socialist Bernard Sanders and Susan Sweetser, a Republican. "Fred came out originally and said, 'Bernie's my guy,' " O'Brien said. "But then, one day at a milking contest, Susan Sweetser came over and put her arm around him. She's young and attractive, so Fred told her, 'I'm gonna vote for you.' When some political reporters questioned Fred about how he could endorse both candidates, he kind of rubbed his hands together and smiled and said, 'Ooh, that's a problem, isn't it?' For a while, he decided he'd gotten in so much trouble he wasn't going to endorse anybody. He finally went with Bernie Sanders, but he said he'd enjoyed kissing Susan Sweetser. In the long run, I think Fred will survive politically. He's the Teflon man."

JURY DUTY

A novelist who served on one of the juries that announced the National Book Awards last week filed this report about her experience with literary prizes:

LAST June I got a call from someone at the National Book Foundation inviting me to join a committee of five writers who would actually read two hundred and fifty novels and short-story collections in order to nominate five finalists and name the winner of this year's National Book Award for fiction. In early October, the committee—the chairperson Kathryn Harrison, Elizabeth Spencer, Benjamin Cheever, David Bradley, and me—announced its nominees. The next morning we woke up to vilification in the Washington *Post*, where an article quoted several book critics to the effect that we were irresponsible lunkheads who wouldn't know talent if it licked us up and down. We were accused of having perversely overlooked the obvious, most deserving authors in favor of lesser-known ones. A few weeks later, the *Times* chimed in, quoting one publishing executive as saying, "We was robbed." Some fun.

Andrea Barrett

At one o'clock on the day of the awards dinner, in New York, we met in the Carlyle's dining room to pick the winner.

"I'll have the fugitive shrimp," Kathryn said.

"Willfully obscure salad for me," Ben said.

Elizabeth sighed and said, "We're lazy. We're lazy and we're mean. Isn't that the gist of it?"

David said something unprintable, and we ordered wine.

"Let's just rise above it," Kathryn said.

"Let's just slink beneath it," Ben said, and we all ate lunch and said things about the five finalists which we'd said before and a few new things and, never having met her in person or read any of her four previous books, we decided to give the award to Andrea Barrett, the author of a collection called "Ship Fever and Other Stories," for her elegant economies and full heart.

At eight o'clock that evening, we all sat down to little piles of smoked salmon at tables for twelve in the Waldorf's Grand Ballroom and prepared to make small talk while waiting for the winners to be announced. Calvin Trillin was master of ceremonies, and as he was reciting a cute verse about Bob Dole and the rhymability of his name a nice-looking stranger on my left smiled and asked me, "Do you write for pay?" I nodded and he leaned forward. "I have a story to tell you," he said.

It begins. It has a rich, descriptive background. Immediately I see the part of New York where it's set—a park in a square—and the smartly dressed residents. Immediately I know that behind the freshly painted doors and window boxes all is not well. Updikey. Auchinclossy. Not bad. My ears pick up another voice—that of Joyce Carol Thomas at the podium, who seems to be introducing a new N.B.A. category of Young People's Literature. The winner, I vaguely take in, is Victor Martinez.

The story obliterates Martinez's grateful words. It has villains. Modern villains with dark and not entirely knowable motives. Villains who are cracked images of ourselves. I barely notice when the salmon timbale is removed and William Matthews declares Hayden Carruth the poetry winner and a lady in purple accepts for the absent poet. With the arrival of Chicken Something, the story's hero emerges—a modern hero without clear moral superiority.

I am beginning to see him as someone I might easily know when T. H. Watkins declares that the nonfiction winner is James Carroll. I would like to focus on his acceptance speech, which I sense to be sweet and wry, but now the story is driving toward its dénouement, steady as rain.

Kathryn is on her feet to present the fiction award. I try to give her my attention—she is saying something about "the narrative soul"—but the story rushes on. Now its tone has shifted to magic realism—tree limbs are unexpectedly falling—and minor characters are moving to the center of things, with terrific effect.

I glance furtively at the podium. An-

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drea Barrett is accepting her award. Our winner has wonderful, electrified silver-gray curls. She begins her speech, but I miss what she's saying because now I'm ruminating about who did what to whom in the park and how the thing with the trees was actually done. In the storyteller's pauses between sentences, I glance again at Barrett: We have done the right and good thing. She is gracious in her praise of the other finalists, in her thanks to the important people in her life. I even feel a little proprietary about her low-key elegance—classy midnight pants suit and simple black flats.

Wine-soaked pears with sorbet. The story has become social tragedy while anxiously raising the possibility of an unresolved, postmodern ending. I become dimly aware that people are grabbing handfuls of the very good cookies and are getting up from the tables to congratulate the winners or find their coats after making off with the centerpieces of free books. The storyteller has noticed my wandering attention. Abruptly his voice stops. Without quite looking at him, I stand up, and as I do so I remember all those terrible people at readings I've given who creep away, throwing on their coats, just when I reach the last page. I want to say, "Tell me how it ends." Instead, before hurrying over to congratulate Andrea Barrett, I manage to say only, "Good night."

TRAINSPOTTING

Cope is a heavyset, twenty-eight-year-old Bronx-born Puerto Rican father of two who is nearing the end of an illustrious *fifteen-year* career as a graffiti writer. He writes his name—"writes" is the preferred verb to describe spray-painting graffiti, or graf, on a public surface—in color-filled letters that blend and slope in a way that suggests live animation. Sabe, a protégé of sorts, is a wiry, eighteen-year-old Bronx-born Dominican whose height of about five feet two inches includes the large black curls that lounge atop his head like an Afro crown. He became a graf-world celebrity in a mere three years, because in place of his name he often writes a six-foot-tall demonic face that appears to be laughing at the viewer. Since 1977, when the Transit Authority introduced the buff (essentially a giant chemical car wash that removes paint), many of New York's graf writers have given up using subway cars as their canvases and have turned to walls and storefront gates. Still, a handful continue to write on trains—a discipline that combines the skills of a visual artist and a second-story burglar.

On a Sunday morning, at 2:30 A.M., Cope and Sabe arrive at the Bedford Park Boulevard station, on the No. 4 line, next to a train yard filled with parked No. 4 and D trains. They split up to scope the train yard for cops, transit workers, or anyone else who might interfere. They are particularly wary of the vandal squad, an N.Y.P.D. division set up to combat graf. Sabe likes to play cat and mouse with the squad. "I talk to them on the phone," he says. "I tell them, 'This is Sabe. Have you seen my trains lately?' " He goes on, "In graffiti, what everybody's really out for is fame. And one part of fame is when a writer gets caught, he is questioned. They say, 'Do you know Sabe? You get less time if you turn him in.' "

For some time, Cope and Sabe stand outside a fence in front of the station looking for cops and rival graf artists. The yard looks empty, so Cope reaches into Sabe's black duffelbag and pulls out a pair of large red fence cutters. He calmly walks over to the fence and begins to cut a square—quietly, efficiently—about three feet by three feet. As he moves back to the bag, two bells announce that a train is coming into the station. The train deposits and collects passengers, then lumbers on, and Cope pries back the fence with his hands to enlarge the hole. Sabe squeezes through. Cope follows, cutting his left hand on the jagged wire. He doesn't seem to notice the gashes or the trail of red dots he leaves behind.

Following a winding, well-trod dirt path through a stand of trees, Cope and Sabe make their way to the back of the yard, where the trains are parked for the night. Then Sabe opens his bag and pulls out six cans of Krylon spray paint in white, off-white, yellow, black, and two shades of blue. Before Cope begins to write, he puts a surgeon's mask over his mouth and nose and notices he's bleeding. He licks the blood off his fingers and follows Sabe to a No. 4 train. Both write in short controlled blasts of paint: off-white outlined in black for Cope; white dotted with light-blue spots and outlined in dark blue for Sabe.

During one of Cope's blood-licking breaks, a D train begins rumbling into the yard on the tracks next to the train that Cope and Sabe are writing on. For a moment, its headlamps flash directly on them.

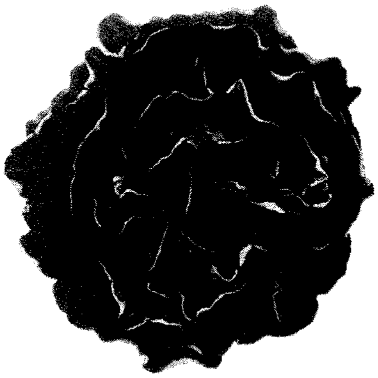
"Oh, shit!" Cope says.

They dart to the rear of the subway car, pull open the door, and climb on board. They creep to the front car, weaving between poles, ducking under windows. Cope asks nervous questions. "Yo, did that conductor see us? Is he gonna go phone it to the vandal squad? How come you didn't see him? Do you think he saw us?"

They find seats next to the conductor's booth—out of any possible line of vision—and catch their breath. Sabe looks around and announces it's "time to play locksmith," and goes to the door of the conductor's booth. "If we get raided, we can hide in here," he says.

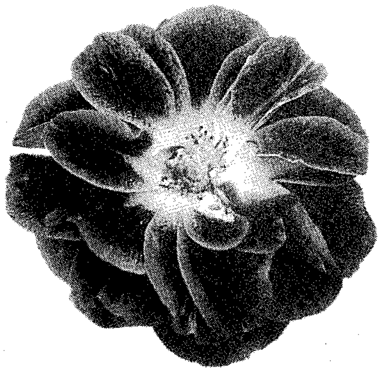
After twenty minutes during which neither of them makes a sound, Cope grows confident that they weren't spotted, mainly because there hasn't been any sign of the vandal squad. When the D train pulls out of the station, he and Sabe go outside to complete their pieces. Both add a yellow background. Then they step back. Later that morning the paint will be discovered and washed off, so Cope pulls out a camera and records their night's work for posterity. ♦

"The Vital Center," Malcolm Gladwell, Mark Singer; "Jury Duty," Amy Bloom; "Trainspotting," Touré.

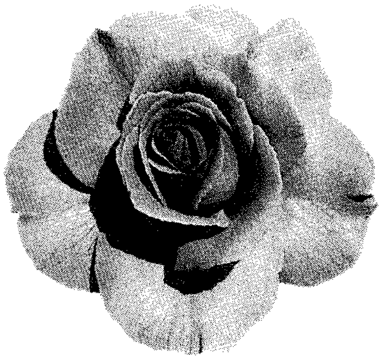


Baron Girod de L'Ain

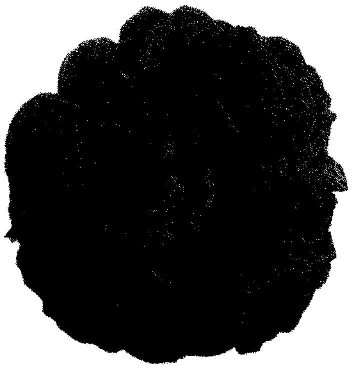
Mischief



Matangi

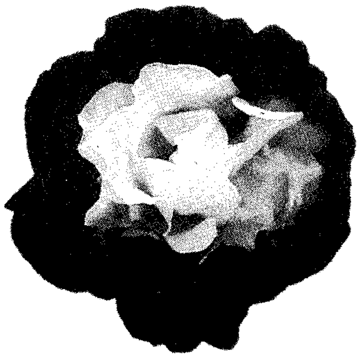


Charm of Paris

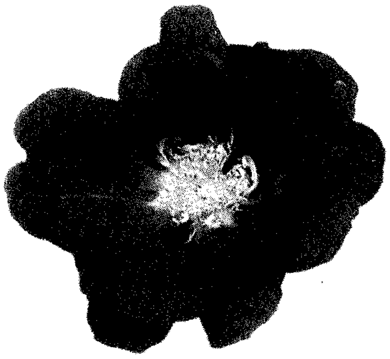


Gloire de Ducher

Picasso



Double Delight



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Queen Elizabeth

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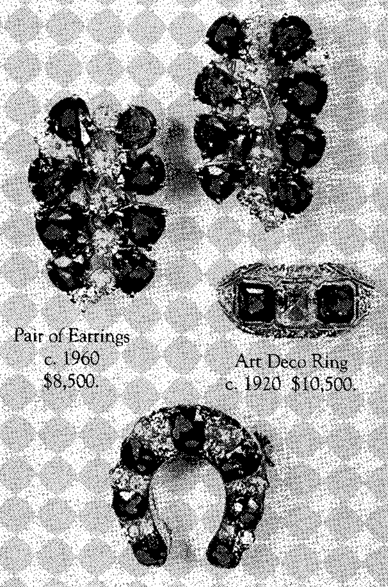

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ANNALS OF COMMUNICATIONS

INSIDE STORY

Why did both candidates despise the press?

BY KEN AULETTA

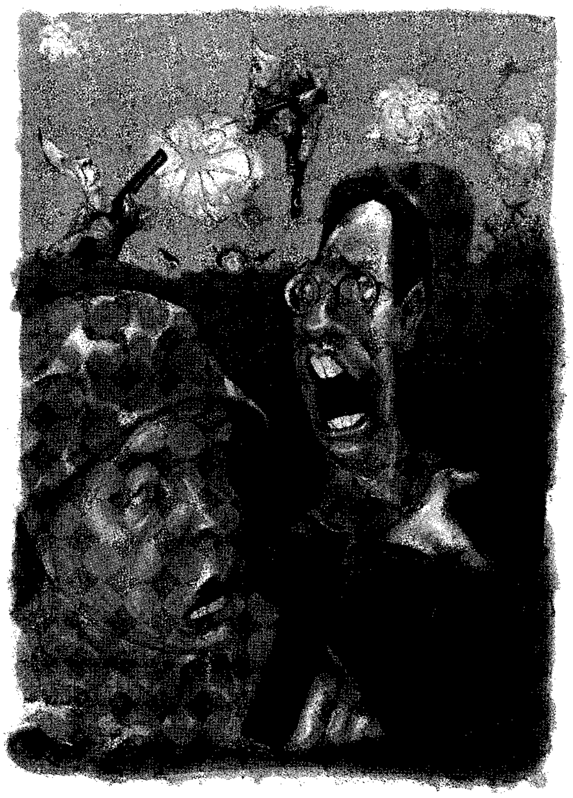
WHEN the 1996 Presidential race ended—when the last bridge to the twenty-first century had been proposed and the last "He's a liberal, he's a liberal" had been uttered—the press called it an awful, dispiriting campaign. President Clinton and Bob Dole, many wrote, were negative and cynical and had become slaves to the latest poll.

From behind the lines of the two campaigns, the press was viewed in similarly unflattering terms. Michael McCurry, the White House press secretary, and John Buckley, Dole's communications director, saw the press as negative and cynical and infatuated with poll numbers. They regarded the press as one adversary in a daily three-front war.

In battling each other, McCurry and Buckley used the traditional weapons of a modern campaign, such as sneak attacks. Against the press, they relied more on seduction, employing humor, fact sheets, gentle rebukes, charm, hot food, cold beer, access. But even as Buckley and McCurry tried to cajole the press they found themselves caught up in a third struggle—with the candidates themselves. Among the things that Dole and Clinton have in common is a deep loathing for the press, a tendency to generalize about "them," and this created special problems for Buckley and McCurry.

Clinton "likes Mike personally, but he treats him as a necessary evil," a senior White House aide confided recently. "He sees him as an agent of the press. He lectures him about sticking up for the press." Whenever Dole granted an interview and it came off poorly, he blamed Buckley and his staff for encouraging him to do it. In the final weeks of the campaign, Dole could not contain his hatred of the media. Pushing aside texts prepared by his staff, he ad-libbed attacks on "the élite liberal press," especially the New York *Times*.

During the past two months, McCurry and Buckley spoke to me about the frustrations they experienced in their jobs and about the men who employed them. Although McCurry, unlike Buckley, was confident of victory in a campaign that lacked suspense from start to finish, there were few moments of joy for either man.



McCurry and Buckley. The press is not so much ideologically biased as simply in favor of conflict.

STEVE BRODNER

THROUGHOUT the campaign, McCurry worried less about Dole than about what he called "an atom bomb"—perhaps a Whitewater-related explosion or a press storm over some new character issue that would cause a majority of voters, who had already told pollsters that they didn't trust Clinton, to take the next step and decide not to vote for him.

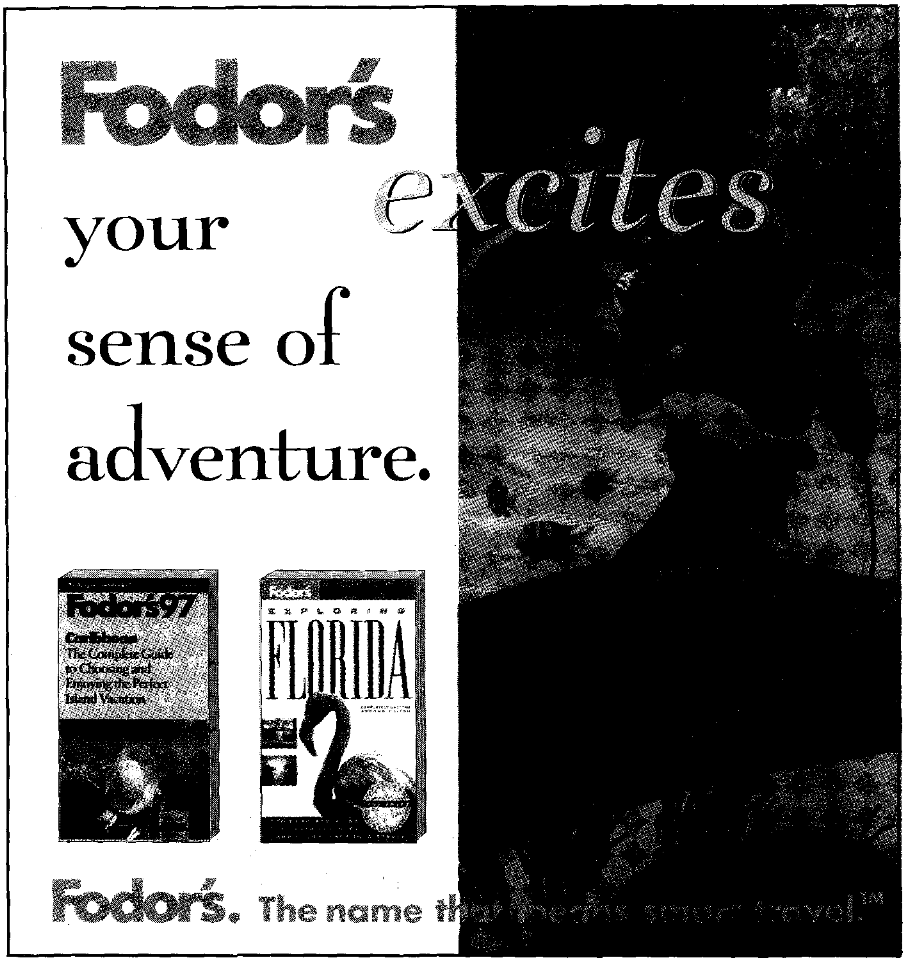
Clinton's strategy was to float above the fray by "being Presidential and campaigning as President," said Donald Baer, a former lawyer, reporter, and editor with *U.S. News & World Report*, who is now the White House communications director. No more jogging in shorts, and no more pit stops at McDonald's.

"One of the lessons we learned is that even when the message was strained through the filter of skeptical press coverage, the public heard it," Baer said. "What we learned was the corollary of Michael Deaver's old rule that all that mattered was the picture, and you could turn down the sound. We realized that you had to turn up the sound. Deaver was wrong. The substance mattered. If the headline was 'CLINTON PANDERS ON EDUCATION,' the public heard 'CLINTON SUPPORTS COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS.' "

In this campaign, Clinton displayed a restraint that he had not shown before. It no doubt helped, White House aides say, that Ann Devroy, of the Washington *Post*—the most aggressive, the most feared, and possibly the best White House reporter—was seriously ill and on the sidelines throughout the campaign. Although Clinton himself made few overtures, his fractious relations with the White House press corps improved.

Meanwhile, the Dole campaign often scheduled—and then cancelled—interviews with the local press. Dole complained that his message was not getting out, but he repeatedly turned down chances for press coverage. Although Dole's camp, like Clinton's, believed that the three network nightly newscasts were the most important medium, reaching thirty-two million viewers each day, in September Dole or his staff spurned every offer that Jeff Zucker, the executive producer of NBC's "Today" show and the network's political producer for the campaign, made to have Dole appear on an NBC news program. "It says something about a campaign at this stage, that either the candidate's comfort level is not there or his staff is incompetent," Glenn Kessler, of *Newsday*, said. "His staff should be able to say, 'Do the interviews.' "

But Buckley and the Dole staff knew very well that Dole didn't want to do the interviews. He was so enraged at what he thought was the media's eagerness to catch him making a mistake that he was unwilling to risk the exposure. He was a man who, in Buckley's words, "likes to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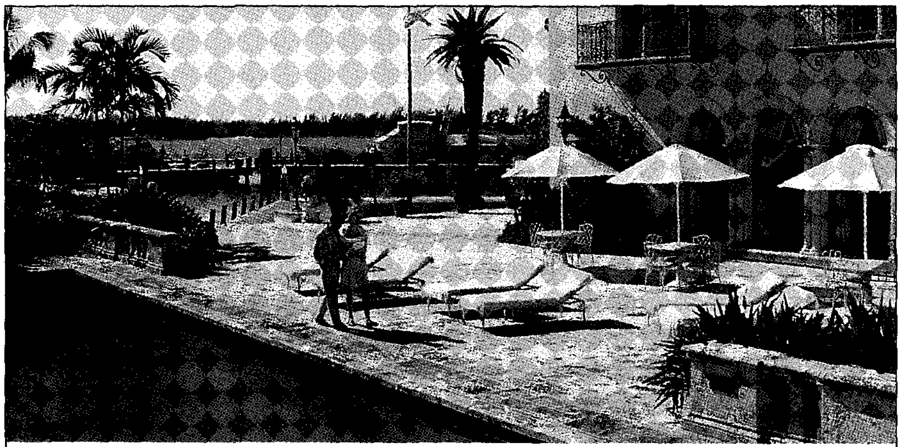

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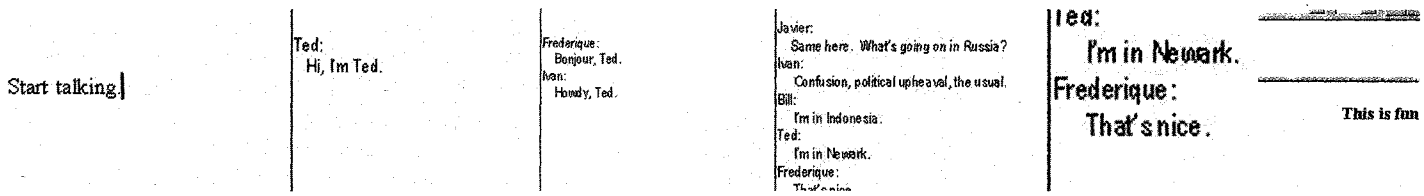


Start talking

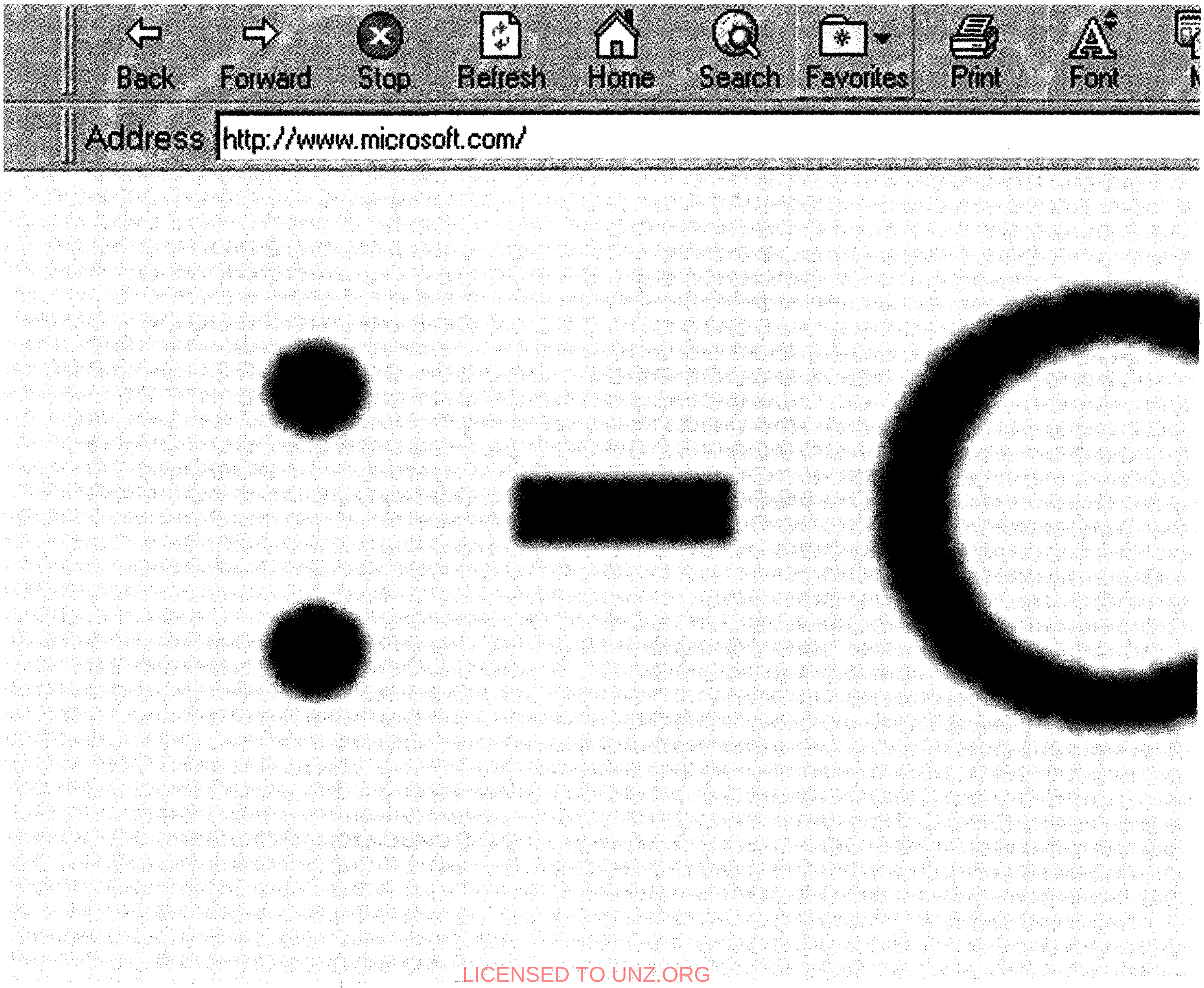
Ted:
Hi, I'm Ted.

Frederique:
Bonjour, Ted.
Ivan:
Howdy, Ted.

Javier:
Same here. What's going on in Russia?
Ivan:
Confusion, political upheaval, the usual.
Bill:
I'm in Indonesia.
Ted:
I'm in Newark.
Frederique:

Ted:
I'm in Newark.
Frederique:
That's nice.

This is fun



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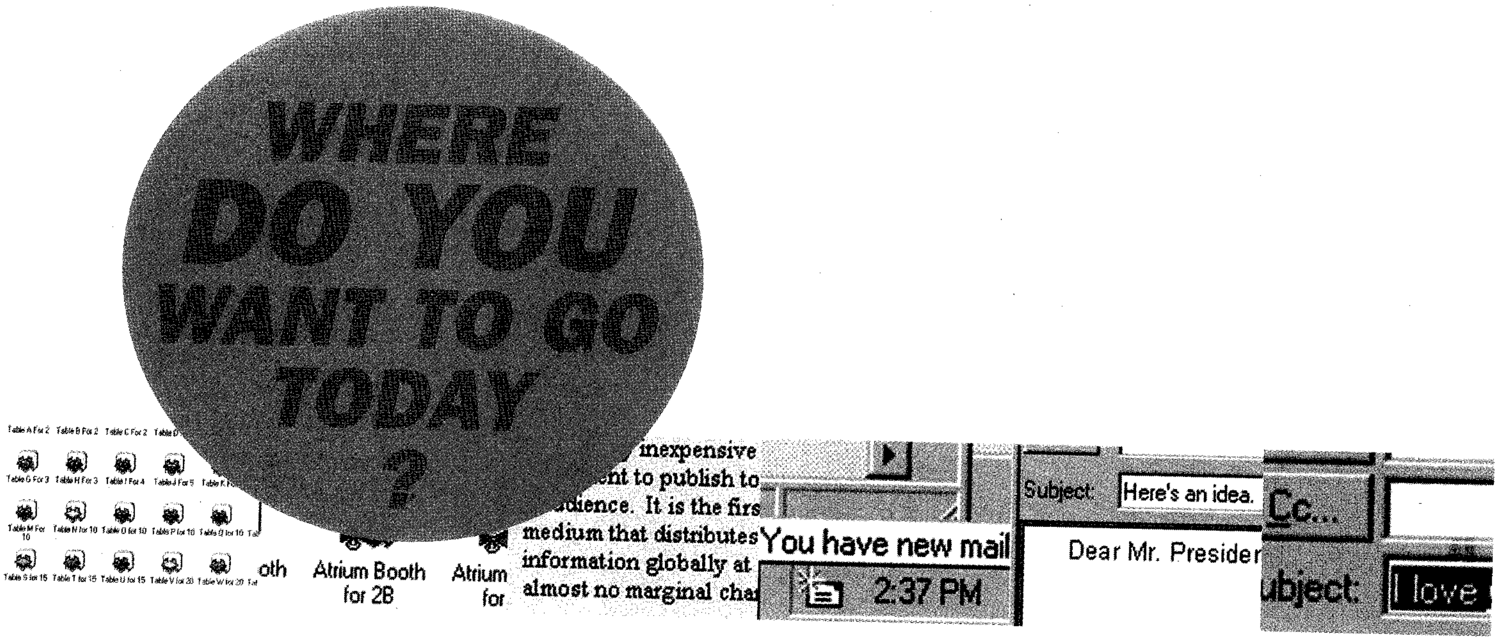
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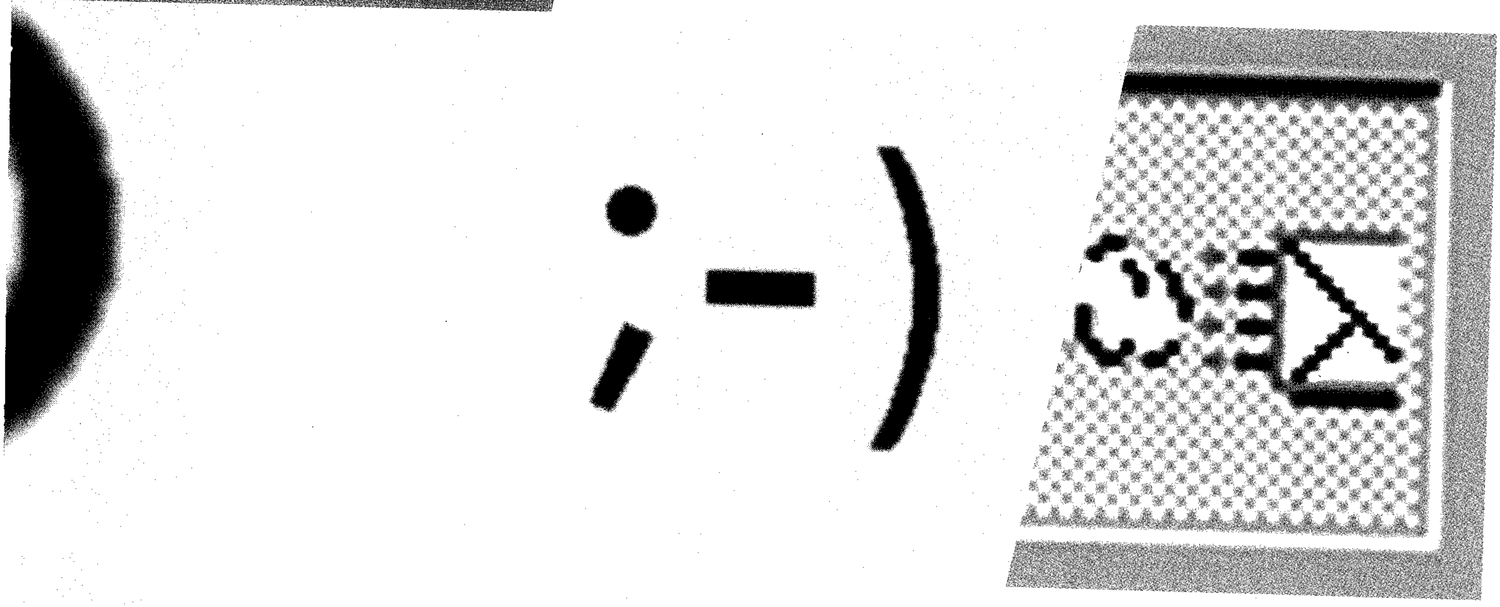


"What are you—some kind of justice freak?"

• •

move in his own orbit." Buckley would send Dole memos suggesting interviews, with "yes" or "no" boxes next to each name. "Often they would come back with question marks," said Buckley, who grew to admire Dole but became frustrated as the question marks accumulated. In early September, Buckley told me, "There is still a candidate belief that you keep reporters far away."

By the second week in October, relations between Dole and the press had become more relaxed. The détente, pushed by Buckley, who was not close to Dole, was the result of a recommendation by Margaret Tutwiler, a senior adviser to the campaign, who had been enlisted to travel with Dole and help evaluate his press strategy. She told friends she was appalled that the campaign was not availing itself of relatively safe press opportunities: inviting local reporters onto his plane the day before he visited their city, so that he would get a story in the local media the day he arrived; hooking up with local drive-time radio talk shows; and granting interviews to local TV anchors. She blamed inexperience for these failings.

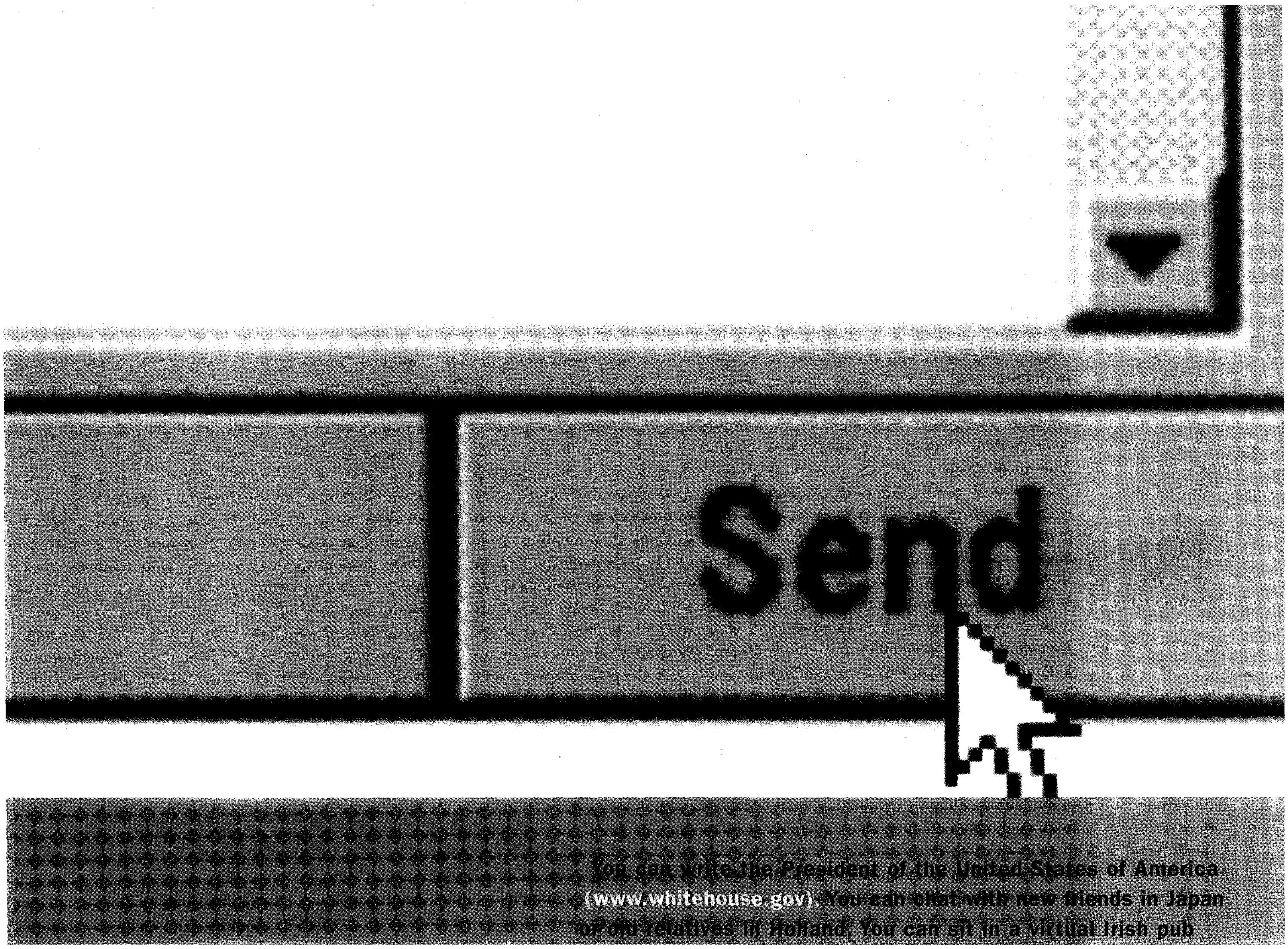
But there was another explanation for Dole's seemingly irrational press policy, and it remained a closely held campaign secret. Dole had learned in early September that Charles Babcock, an investigative reporter for the Washington *Post*, was pursuing a charge that in the late nineteen-sixties, when Dole was married to his first wife, he had had an affair. Babcock, it seemed, had interviewed the woman, who had confirmed the story. All at once, Dole—not Clinton—was fretting about "bimbo eruptions."

Dole and his second wife, Elizabeth, became apoplectic. In September, Mrs. Dole phoned Donald Graham, the *Post's* publisher; Mari Will, who is the wife of the columnist George Will and had been Dole's press secretary during the 1988 campaign, got in touch with the *Post's* executive editor, Leonard Downie, Jr. Both women urged the newspaper to respect Dole's privacy. As long as Dole was uncertain whether the *Post* intended to publish the story, the situation "totally froze his willingness to submit to television interviews," a senior campaign aide said. "It was like the sword of Damocles. He never knew whether the day he granted the interview would be the day the *Post* broke the story." Dole feared a media frenzy that would doom his candidacy. So, for much of September—and then again in late October—he erected a wall between himself and the press.

Because Dole's motivations were not known to the press or the public, the campaign often assumed baffling contours; at times, no one was more mystified than the beat reporters who were covering the candidate. Blaine Harden, who followed Dole for the Washington *Post*, and who has been a foreign correspondent, told me in October, "I've never been around one of these strange things before. My experience of elections is Eastern Europe and Africa, where campaigns are about what the candidates truly believe, and not these nuanced, poll-driven, photo-op things." In Croatia, he said, "Franjo Tudjman, a demagogue, holds press conferences. There are open questions from the foreign press: 'Are you a dictator? Why are you subverting the Constitution?' The last Dole press conference"—other than the one at which he announced his retirement from the Senate—"was in the Florida primary, in March."

MIKE McCURRY and John Buckley, adversaries in the Presidential campaign, were, as it happened, also friends. They had got acquainted in the late eighties, when each was the spokesman for his party organization, and during the early nineties they had become better acquainted at the Washington public-relations firm then known as Robinson, Lake, Lerer & Montgomery. Each was a senior vice-president there, with McCurry concentrating on clients like MTV, and Buckley on clients like I.B.M. "I helped recruit Mike," Buckley said.

Buckley was well known to reporters. A nephew of William F. Buckley, Jr., he was a former reporter and music critic for the counterculture *SoHo Weekly News* and the author of two novels. He had been deputy press secretary in Ronald Reagan's 1984 campaign, press secretary to Representative Jack Kemp, and, in 1989, director of communications for the National Republican Congressional Committee. McCurry, who had worked for Democratic Presidential contenders since 1984, opposed Clinton in the 1992 primaries as press secretary for Senator Bob Kerrey, of Nebraska. He then became the State Department's official spokesman, and Clinton brought him to the White House in January of 1995—replacing Dee Dee Myers, who had replaced George Stephanopoulos. The change was dramatic, Laurence McQuillan, the Reuters White House correspondent, recalled. "When



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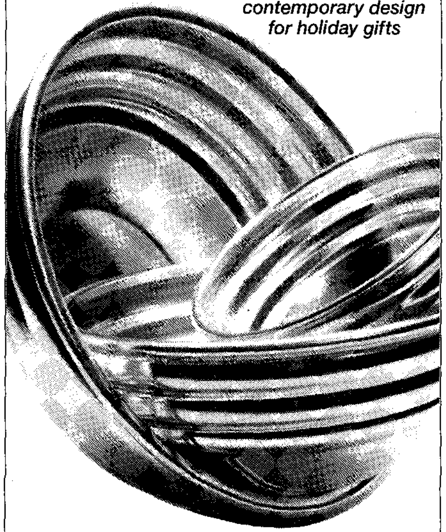

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George Stephanopoulos was press secretary, we would bring complaints to him, and George would sit there chewing bubble gum and blowing bubbles, slouched in his chair," McQuillan said. "It seemed like a deliberate sign that he wanted the meeting to get over. McCurry is one hundred and eighty degrees different. He seems to enjoy reporters, and it creates a different response."

During this year's campaign, Buckley and McCurry kept up their friendship, speaking from time to time. In October, when a former college roommate revealed that Buckley had smoked marijuana as a student at Hampshire College, in the late seventies, a small media tempest ensued. McCurry, who had once confessed to smoking pot while a student at Princeton, in the mid-seventies, stood on the podium of the White House briefing room and complained that Buckley had "been done an injustice."

The two men, according to Ken Lerer, their supervisor at the public-relations firm, "have almost identical personalities"—calm and self-effacing. They are close in age: McCurry is forty-two, Buckley is thirty-nine. Each has battled the establishment wing of his party—McCurry, when he worked for Senator John Glenn, in 1984, opposed liberals like Walter Mondale, and Buckley, as a Kemp supporter, opposed traditional Republicans like George Bush. Both voted for Clinton in 1992. And among reporters who need straight answers both are unusually popular. "They've actually been a pleasure to deal with," NBC's Jeff Zucker said.

Considering that the President has had such a triumphant year, it seems odd that he (like Dole) should have felt such Nixonian rage toward reporters. Stephanopoulos, the senior adviser to Clinton, who has been by his side since 1991 and displays the same rancor, traces Clinton's hostility to the 1992 primaries, when Gennifer Flowers told a supermarket tabloid that she had had a twelve-year affair with Clinton while he was governor of Arkansas. "He's had more attention to his past and his personal life than any other public official ever, from an unflattering light, based on sources that are suspect but are treated as credible," Stephanopoulos said. "You'd be upset, too."

A more complex explanation is offered by McCurry. "His view of the press is that there is a unique political culture in Washington, defined by establishment figures in the press and figures in Washington, and those figures have never been able to accept him for what he is," McCurry said. "That is why from the minute he arrived here they tried to destroy him."

McCurry's observation evokes memories of Lyndon B. Johnson. But Clinton is by far the more sophisticated of the two, for Johnson was always sensitive about his rural background, especially when he was in the company of Ivy Leaguers. Clinton, as a Rhodes Scholar and a Yale Law School graduate, has built a network of establishment friends. Yet, according to McCurry, Clinton sees Whitewater and Gennifer Flowers and all the assaults on his character as arising from Washington's contemptuous attitude toward his Arkansas origins. "He feels he's been rejected by Washington society," McCurry said. "The press belongs to an axis that he has not been able to charm."

Perhaps because he maintained a comfortable lead over Dole throughout the campaign, Clinton kept his anger camouflaged. Dole did not. In three previous bids for national office, Dole thought that the press had caricatured him as Mean Bob. As his campaign limped into October, advisers were still livid over what they saw as reporters' anti-Republican bias. Buckley swam against this current. When he was asked whether he agreed that the press was biased, he answered, "I can't allow myself to believe it's true, because it distorts my ability to get my job done. My job is to persuade reporters of the rightness of my cause. If I go in persuaded that they are persuaded by their liberalism, I hurt my cause."

McCURRY and Buckley are personally fond of many reporters, but they also share a sometimes savage view of the press. Both know that the press is not so much ideologically biased as simply in favor of conflict, that too often reporters prefer a quick headline to a deeper understanding. McCurry and Buckley cite some familiar complaints: that all too often the lighter burden of proof that is acceptable among tabloid newspapers and television has become acceptable in the mainstream press as well, and that reporters are too cynical, too conspiracy-minded, and too caught up in polls and punditry, and therefore skimp on coverage of what the candidates say. Both, however, make a fresh claim:

reporters and editors have allowed news to surrender to opinion.

"The hard-news lead and story has been replaced by the analytical story," McCurry said in mid-September. Because editors are aware that by morning their readers will have already learned from television and radio what the candidates did the day before, McCurry explained, they demand more "context," which can be a synonym for attitude or opinion. "My guess is that one-third to one-half of every story written about the campaign reflects some level of analysis," McCurry said. "Look at the New York *Times* and the Washington *Post*."

That same day, John Buckley, sitting in his office at Dole campaign headquarters in Washington, echoed McCurry's lament. "The margins have widened for political coverage," he said. "The way it should work is: Cover what he did, what he said, but don't lead with the context and the interpretation. I may be naïve, but I believe that a Presidential candidate has the right to deliver a message."

McCurry complained about the adoption by "Ivy League and upper-income reporters" of a more cynical, and even "bratty" attitude, which leads to a more adversarial relationship. Buckley attributed the preoccupation with process, polls, and handlers to Theodore H. White's first campaign book, "The Making of the President 1960," which grafted a dramatic narrative onto campaigns. Robert Lichter, a co-director, with his wife, Linda, of the nonprofit Center for Media and Public Affairs, in Washington, traces the trend toward opinionated reporting to the 1988 Bush campaign, when the press felt that it was being manipulated by photo opportunities.

Throughout the campaign, both sides complained of press bias. In May, Buckley wrote to Joseph Lelyveld, the *Times*' executive editor, saying, "I think it's important to bring to your attention concerns we have about the *Times*' coverage of Senator Dole's candidacy. I do so with respect, and in the spirit of a ballplayer stating, early in the game, that he thinks the ump's strike zone may be a bit too narrow." The letter went on to discuss the previous day's front-page coverage of the two candidates, which he thought was skewed toward Clinton.

Lelyveld called Buckley after receiving the letter. "His response was 'We blew it,'" Buckley said. "It was totally gracious." Lelyveld invited Buckley to get in touch with him directly if he had any subsequent complaints about *Times* coverage. Lelyveld told me recently, "We dropped the ball that day. We had been snookered that day. We took Clinton a little too seriously and Dole not seriously enough."

Nevertheless, over the next few months, Buckley said, the *Times* concentrated on Dole's mishaps, leaving his speeches "virtually uncovered." The *Times* reported on the candidate, but, Buckley complained, "always in the context of 'How's he doing?'" And the *Times*, he believed, "drives the news coverage" of other reporters. He protested often, not to Lelyveld but to the *Times*' Washington editor, Andrew Rosenthal, and to the two principal reporters on the Dole campaign, Adam Nagourney and Katharine Q. Seelye.

Lelyveld insisted, "I'm really proud of our campaign coverage," and he defended the trend toward more contextual reporting. "We're not a headline service," he told me. "We used to spend a lot of time in hotel ballrooms covering the speeches of candidates. . . . We've converted our space to more enterprising reporting." He acknowledged that having fewer strictures posed a risk that opinion could infiltrate news columns, then added, "But the risk is under very great control. I think we're very straight." Reporters, who like to think of themselves as members of a profession, rebel against the idea that they are stenographers. Jeff Fager, the executive producer of CBS Evening News, said, "If we don't go out and report that Clinton is talking about campaign-finance reform and that the record shows he did almost nothing in his four years for campaign-finance reform, we are not doing our jobs."

THE Clinton advisers privately agreed that a majority of the reporters who cover Washington are at least moderately liberal, but they felt no less beleaguered than the Dole camp, claiming that the press had given excessive emphasis to Clinton's personal life and Whitewater and other so-called ethical lapses. "We are, I believe, held to higher standards on a range of issues than Dole," Stephanopoulos said, arguing, for example, that Clinton's fund-raising was continually

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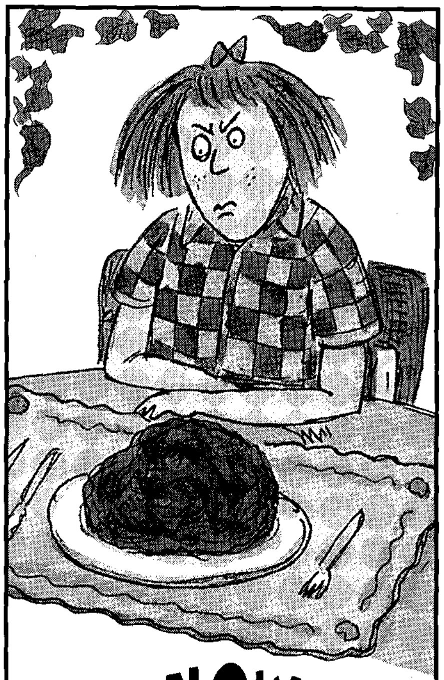

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placed under a microscope while Dole's was not.

Reporters write "within paradigms," the Presidential assistant Rahm Emanuel said. "Bob Dole said he took positions in the primary that he totally disagreed with. Nobody picked that up. The reason nobody picked it up is that the paradigm is that 'Bob Dole is a principled person, who only operates on principle.' Had Bill Clinton taken similar positions, I think reporters would have grabbed on to it."

It was another sort of paradigm—a belief among many reporters that the President has something to hide—that led to one of McCurry's more surreal encounters with the press, on the morning of September 12th. Dole had called for Clinton to release not just summaries of his medical exams but the complete records. And, sure enough, at a regular briefing, in Fresno, California, McCurry was asked a total of thirty-six questions about Clinton's health and only fifteen about Iraq, which the United States had just bombed and was poised to bomb again. The exchanges showed McCurry's good humor and patience, as well as his exasperation.

During the briefing, McCurry repeated that Clinton had made his doctors available to reporters and had released more detailed medical summaries than either of his two predecessors. Even Presidents, he said, deserved a zone of privacy and dignity.

"So there's nothing in any of these medical records that a normal person might consider embarrassing to the President?" one reporter asked.

"I wouldn't say that," McCurry responded, unwittingly arousing suspicion. Some tests had to be summarized by physicians, because laymen wouldn't understand the charts. And "all of us undergo tests that I'm not sure that any of us would want to have spread out and printed on the front page of the newspaper."

Reporters' imaginations ran wild. What tests? Could he characterize a test that might be embarrassing? McCurry deflected the questions, urging the reporters to "just think for a minute."

According to the White House transcript, the following exchange erupted:

> Q: Does he have a sexually transmitted disease? I mean, what is—
> Q: Jesus!
> MR. MCCURRY: Good God, do you really want to ask that question?
> Q: No, I'm just asking what is embarrassing.

Had the President demanded that his medical records be sealed? No, McCurry answered. Clinton had instructed his staff to tell reporters "what they need to know."

"But that's not the same thing, Mike," a reporter said.

"The astonishing question—did you answer that, or say that it's inappropriate to be asked?" one semi-baffled reporter asked.

"If there was anything related to a disease or health condition the President had, it would have been accurately and timely reported to you," McCurry countered.

"So you're saying that he's in perfect health and—"

"No, I did not say that," McCurry protested. He was trying to indicate that no one is in perfect health, but instead he fuelled suspicion that he was hiding something.

Again, he was asked if in the past four years Clinton had had a sexually transmitted disease. After gasping again, McCurry said, "It's obvious he has not, because that would have been reported at the time he had his annual medical exam."

Since he would have disclosed the fact if Clinton had had such a disease, a reporter persisted, "What level of privacy are you trying to protect?" What chart was he worried about releasing? None, McCurry answered. The briefing continued:

> Q: Mike, you seem to be saying that even . . . taking a test for HIV, or some other sexually transmitted disease, is in and of itself embarrassing.
> MR. MCCURRY: Look, I'm trying to keep some level of dignity here. I'm talking about things like rectal exams, O.K. Do you want to have all those things spread out to here? . . . You guys are really bored. It's hard to know that there is a campaign under way here.

A month later, on October 11th, McCurry was worried that the atomic blast he had dreaded might be coming. That morning, the *Times* carried a story by Jeff Gerth and Stephen Labaton exploring President Clinton's ties to James Riady, an Indonesian businessman who had known Clinton since 1977, when Riady was working as an interne at an investment bank in Little Rock. He was the son of a billionaire who founded the Lippo Group, a Hong Kong- and Jakarta-based multinational financial and real-estate empire. The *Times* reported that Indonesia's Ambassador had asked Riady to help "arrange a rare meeting" with the President, and that the Riadys were a source of campaign cash for Clinton. A Los Angeles *Times* story two weeks earlier had explained how a former Lippo executive, John Huang, who was the vice-

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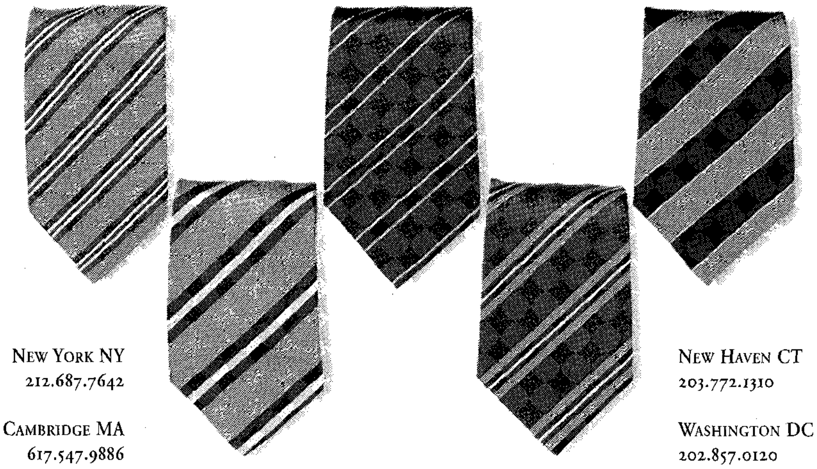

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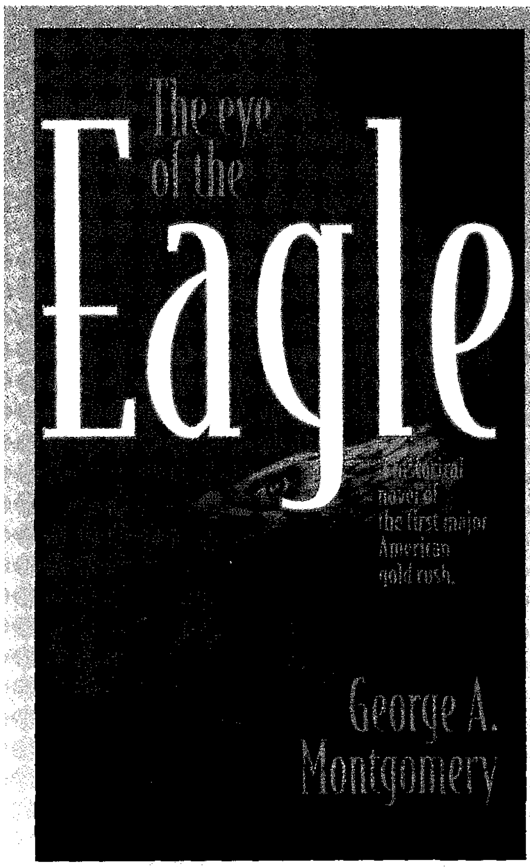
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chairman of the Democratic Party's finance committee and a recent high-ranking trade official in Clinton's Commerce Department, had illegally solicited a two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar contribution from a South Korean magnate, which was returned only after the reporter started asking questions.

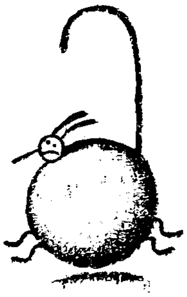
October 11th, a Friday, was what McCurry called "a slow news day," which could heighten interest in the Riady story. The night before, he had prepped himself on the Riady-Clinton tie and on the Clinton Administration's attitude toward the Indonesian regime. The day the story broke, McCurry said to me, "I came to work today thinking, Will Indonesia become a frenzy and will the press decide to hang me out to dry? Sometimes the press does that just to remind us that we're hired help."

Since September, the press has reported that Huang was in hiding, that the South Korean magnate had seemingly disappeared, that Vice-President Al Gore had attended a fund-raiser in a Buddhist temple which was orchestrated by Huang. McCurry and the President's handlers tried to change the subject or confuse the issue by attacking Republicans, by producing new negative TV ads charging the Dole campaign with corruption, and by ignoring reporters' shouted questions.

The issue wounded Clinton, but it did not become what McCurry feared. "It did not go thermonuclear," he said. "It stayed conventional." This made Republicans all the more certain that there was a press double standard. "They don't put any anti-Clinton stories in the New York *Times*," Dole cried on October 24th, even though the *Times* had broken the Whitewater story and was now pursuing the Riady connection. Polls showed that this story, like Whitewater, was not registering with the public. John Buckley knew this, but he maintained that the press treated influence-peddling in the Clinton Administration as "separate, discrete events" rather than as part of a pattern. "The press is not tying it together," he told me.

In the final weeks of the campaign, it was Dole who fretted about a major surprise. Two weeks before Election Day, he learned that the tabloid press was investigating a rumor of yet another decades-old affair. Dole began to worry, as he had worried in September, that his own character as the pro-family-values candidate was about to be shredded. He was convinced that the tabloids could put pressure on America's mainstream press to run with the story, as had happened in 1992 with Gennifer Flowers' charges. Suddenly, in mid-October, Dole once again began declining interviews, including even relatively safe appearances on "Larry King Live" and "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer." And he increased his attacks on the media, imploring voters to "rise up" against them.

As it turned out, the *Village Voice* published parts of the story in its October 29th and November 5th issues, while the mainstream press all but ignored the allegations. Dole's assault on the press in the closing days of the campaign was decoded by a top campaign strategist: "We are really saying to the New York *Times* and the rest of the media, 'If you follow the *National Enquirer* and the *Village Voice*, you are out to get me.' It was a preëmptive strike."



JOURNALISTS seemed to admire the efficiency of the Clinton machine even as they mistrusted it. "They feed the beast better than the Dole campaign," the New York *Post* correspondent Thomas Galvin observed. An army of Clinton aides regularly showered reporters with briefing materials: any time reporters joined the campaign somewhere or were expected to explain legislation signed by Clinton, they found they had the information at their fingertips. McCurry and the campaign spokesman Joe Lockhart mingled easily with reporters, conducted regular briefings, and allowed the reporters plenty of time to file their stories. By hanging around reporters, Clinton's aides learned what stories reporters were working on. McCurry liked to say, "I'm in sales, not product development."

McCurry's office made a sale on September 16th, when the White House tried to upstage Dole in announcing an anticrime effort—and largely succeeded. Television pictures that night showed the President surrounded by policemen in their blue uniforms as he was endorsed by the nation's largest police union.

On the press plane, most reporters saw one thing clearly: Clinton "was about to kick Dole's ass," as one of them put it. That afternoon, I asked Bill Plante, the CBS White House correspondent, if he felt trapped by Clinton's handlers. "For the most part, we set the agenda rather than let them set the agenda," he said. After a pause, he added, "I don't mean that to sound arrogant, but we follow what we think news is. Generally, we develop our own take on it. So I don't feel trapped."

Television coverage of the crime issue was considered "good" by the Clinton staff. A daily memorandum circulated by the campaign aide Mary L. Smith to McCurry and seventeen other senior officials reported that on the three network newscasts Clinton had received nine minutes and sixteen seconds of "good" coverage and only two minutes and fifty seconds of "bad" coverage. Many newspapers, notably the *Times* and the Washington *Post*, packaged the Clinton and Dole crime initiatives as a single story. Mike McCurry was pleased, thinking that the campaigns got a fifty-fifty split in the coverage. John Buckley, for his part, admitted that the Dole campaign had been set back by "the symbolism of the cops" endorsing Clinton and hurt by combined coverage of the two stories.

Again, one reason Dole lost this particular battle was that Clinton's team was more attuned to the media. McCurry conducted at least one daily briefing, because, he explained, "I usually take the temperature of the press to see if they're anxious." Sometimes he found the press anxious about matters that were other than weighty. On the afternoon of the anticrime announcement, for example, McCurry entered a pressroom in Cincinnati, stood on a podium, and asked for questions. There were none, which was unusual, prompting McCurry to joke, "O.K. Brain-dead." Off to the side a moment later, McCurry attributed the dearth of questions to an upcoming Clinton campaign trip. "No one wants to make today too complicated because tomorrow they start a four-day trip, and they want to get home and pack tonight," he remarked, his tone a mixture of affection and resignation.

By contrast, the press held the Dole operation in contempt. Early in his campaign, Dole had made a mistake by instituting a two-tier press system. A select group of reporters from CNN, the networks, the newsweeklies, and a handful of major newspapers were allowed to ride in the back of Dole's 727. The rest of the press corps was orphaned on another airplane—dubbed the Bullship—with no se-

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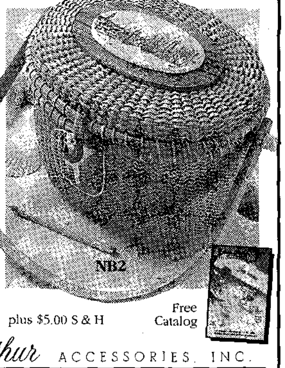

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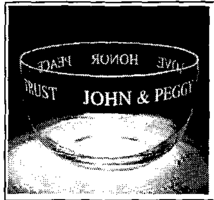

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nior aides in attendance. This arrangement produced resentment. Dole's press secretary, Nelson Warfield, told me in October, "There's a lot of feeling, with justification, of inequitable treatment."

Until early October, the most senior Dole official on the separate press plane was usually Charley Cooper, who is in his twenties. Few briefings had been held on the plane and few materials distributed, and reporters moaned about not having enough time to file stories. Warfield saw it as his job to stay close to Dole, and doing so meant that he was less available to reporters.

The days of the boys on the bus—when politicians and reporters felt relaxed enough around one another to schmooze off the record—were gone. "People who are younger than I am are more intense, more serious," said the Boston *Globe* political reporter Curtis Wilkie, who has been covering Presidential campaigns for two decades. "They are less forgiving. They don't have a good time, and they don't allow politicians to have a good time." And an old-school politician like Bob Dole no doubt found this change of tone hard to get used to. When he was interviewed, he often meandered or got testy. Last summer, when he tried to finesse the abortion controversy within the Republican Party, his ineloquent, verb-free lingo, combined with the news-hungry press pack's eagerness to catch the candidate making a gaffe, ensnared him in further controversy. When, on June 17th, he joked to reporters on the plane that a compromise was a "piece of cake," various newspapers led their coverage with it, suggesting, as Katharine Q. Seelye wrote in the *Times*, that perhaps "he was making an effort to appease the abortion opponents whom he alienated last week."

Looking back on the summer, Buckley thinks that for Dole the coverage of the abortion controversy was a significant moment in the campaign. "He had an epiphany the time he went to the back of the plane," Buckley said. "It became a front-page story. The reporters on his plane were younger and had no clock ticking beyond November 5th. And they had a tendency to play Gotcha! So Dole's traditional Republican distrust of the press came out."

After that, "the curtain came down," Buckley said, unapologetically. It was the only way, he said, to escape the "tar baby" that Dole's gaffes had become—for example, his saying first that he wanted to overturn the assault-weapons ban in the Senate, then refusing to say whether as President he would do so, and shifting again by hinting that he would keep it. He had stubbornly resisted when Peter Jennings, of ABC, and then others pressed him to say whether or not he believed tobacco was addictive: he insisted that it was for some and not for others, and then he blamed "the liberal media" for trying to make him look silly.

By mid-July, Dole was no longer associating with reporters. He did not grant the traditional pre-Convention interviews to the newsweeklies, and he did not offer "exclusive" interviews to the local press on his visits around the country.

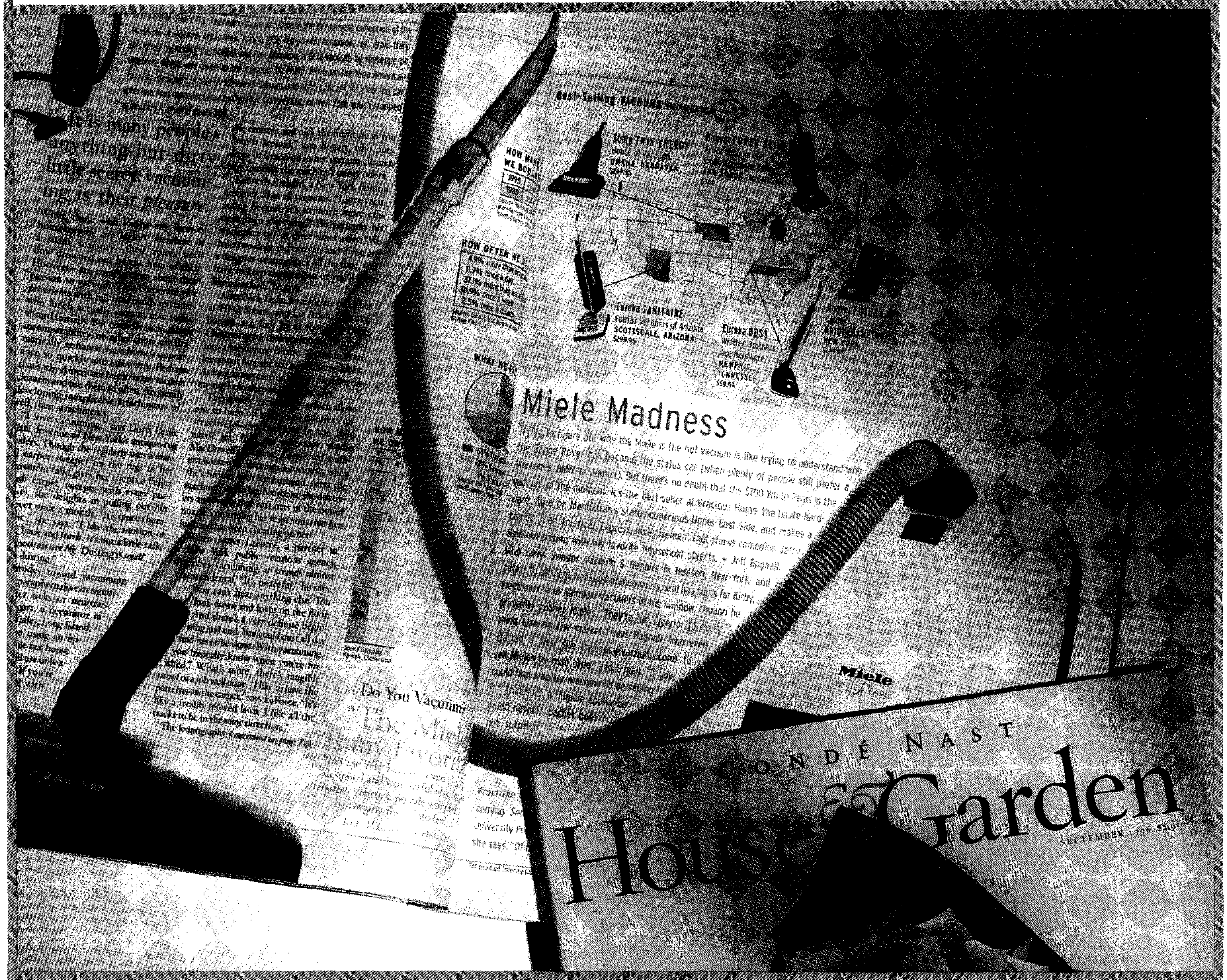
Bringing down the curtain meant that Dole's gaffes were fewer, and the press's Gotcha! game ended. But in a larger sense Dole failed because he had wasted much of the summer, doing little to combat a mind set that was developing in the press, which manifested itself in a campaign narrative that allowed reporters to portray the hapless Dole versus the Clinton juggernaut.

On July 20th, Dole permitted a peek into his own thinking in a rare interview with Blaine Harden. Explaining why he had stopped chatting with the press, Dole said, "I'd like to go back and have fun and have little cracks here and there. But they are going to be misunderstood. . . . There isn't an ounce of humor in the back of that plane. . . . I like to talk to the media. In the Senate, you can banter back and forth. Nobody takes it seriously. . . . But here when you say it somebody is going to write it. I don't know, maybe it's because they don't know me."

Dole's press secretary, Warfield, recalled, "Twice I tried to arrange for Dole to go to the back of the plane" and speak informally to reporters—an account confirmed by journalists. Twice, though, a handful of reporters objected. "Yes, we can do it off the record," a *Times* reporter said the second time, "unless he makes news." For the candidate, the risk exceeded the reward, even though both he and the press suffered a penalty.

The press felt imprisoned. One week this fall, as the press bus transported the *Times* White House correspondent Alison Mitchell from plane to filing center and on to a hotel in Chicago—another

Thank you: we couldn't have said it better ourselves.



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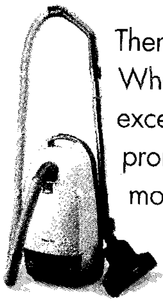

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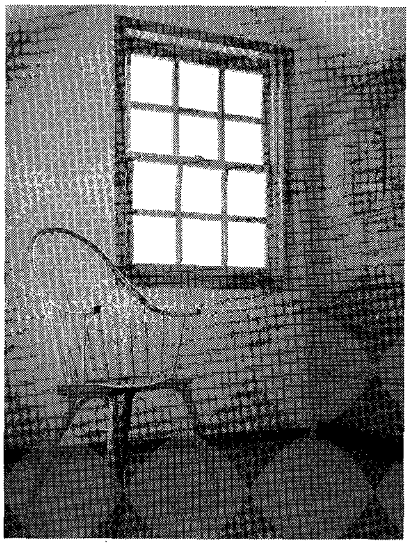

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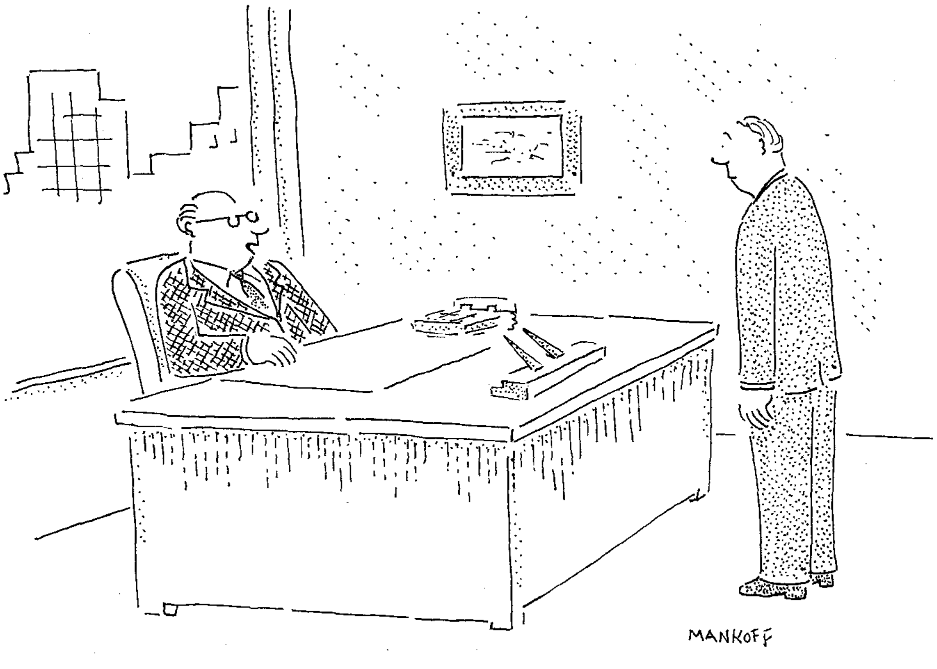
day in which she hadn't seen Clinton except on the TV monitor in the press filing center—she looked around at her colleagues on the bus and asked, "Is this an anachronism? If you can watch the guy on TV, if you can read his speeches pretty fast on the Internet, what are we here for? It's the old assassination watch. I'm not sure what we add. . . . In covering the President, I don't see anything different from what I see on TV."

McCurry and Buckley knew that the Presidential debates would be a critical source of information for voters, and both campaigns began planning—and even spinning—before the first words were spoken at the first debate, in Hartford, on Sunday, October 6th. On October 2nd, for example, Buckley's 8 A.M. meeting with his staff on the communications strategy for the debate outlined a detailed schedule: On Thursday, the Dole campaign would launch negative television ads "designed to set off news at the debate"; Friday, they would "engage local political reporters by announcing state debate-watching parties." Privately, Buckley said that on Saturday Dole would create news that would spill over into the debate by announcing his Cabinet choices, including Colin Powell and William Bennett. (Dole did not do this.) On the day of the debate, Buckley and his staff would be plugged into the database at the Republican National Committee, so as to be ready with an instant debate scorecard of misleading Clinton statements; they would also have a bevy of prominent Dole supporters ready to offer upbeat spin. "On Monday, we'll have the Big Mo press conference," said Buckley, describing their intention to claim total victory whether they achieved it or not.

Meanwhile, McCurry and Stephanopoulos were discussing a radical idea: "We're toying with the notion of no spin," McCurry said. He went on, "It's almost absurd what happens afterward: 'Our guy won!' " Maybe they would say nothing, and just invite reporters across the street for a beer.

In Hartford, conclusions about the first debate were in play even before Clinton and Dole took their places on the podiums. At twenty minutes before nine, the Clinton press office distributed to the hundreds of reporters gathered in the Hartford Civic Center what was labelled "Prebuttal: Dole vs. the Facts"—a six-page single-spaced memo that followed the formula "Dole might say the following, but these are the facts."

David Broder, the Washington *Post* veteran who has been covering campaigns for four decades, remarked that this was the first time he'd ever seen pre-debate spin. Some of the spinners seemed to hate it. Laura D'Andrea Tyson, Clinton's national economic adviser, looked bewildered by the sight of hordes of report-



"Brodkin, now that the economy is creating jobs at a faster than expected clip, why don't you go out and find yourself one?"

ers, pads ready, charging at her fellow-spinners. I asked whether she was embarrassed to be in this position. "A little bit," she said.

At ten minutes past nine, Tabitha Soren, of MTV, walked up the center aisle toward a camera in the basement arena where reporters were gathered, taping a segment in which she told viewers about a debate she was not watching. She did this seventeen times, or until 9:45 P.M., before she and her producer were satisfied. At 9:50 P.M., a commotion occurred when Dole aides rushed from table to table with a single sheet of paper citing three Clinton misstatements of fact so far in the debate. Fifteen minutes before the debate ended, there was a buzz from behind the curtain leading to the rooms where the spinners were watching. Reporters swarmed behind the curtain and found the chairman of the Republican National Committee, Haley Barbour, and Dole's campaign manager, Scott Reed, moving forward.

"What's happening?" one reporter asked.

"They're spinning before the debate is over," another reporter answered, and notepads and microphones soon engulfed the two men. Just a few feet away, another swarm formed around the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Christopher Dodd. Buckley later credited his camp with being the first to get out fact sheets and to enter Spin Alley, while acknowledging that his opponents had more spinners and better signs. "As in so many things they do, it was a joke," he said. "A little bit crass."

Was it difficult for Buckley to smile and spin when, privately, he knew that his candidate was doomed? "This has not been a fun campaign since April," Buckley admitted. "Throughout the campaign, people felt, How do I get out of bed this morning?"

THE increasingly impersonal relations between the press and the candidates was worrisome to Buckley and McCurry, and, as the campaign wore on, McCurry was doing a lot of thinking about how to improve the often chilly relationship between the President and the press corps, in a second term. "If he gets reëlected, that's the only reason I would really want to stay around here much longer—to work on that and to try and see if you could get his head in a different place about that," McCurry told me this fall, while rubbing his eyes in his White House office, halfway between the press-room and the Oval Office. "There's an element in every President— I know the Bushes felt that way, too. They felt that they were always being pounded."

McCurry has already suffered some wounds in this battle. When he tried to place Clinton in less formal settings with the press on Air Force One at the end of a long day in late 1995, Clinton, wearing jeans and relaxing with reporters, talked expansively about his own and his party's mistakes, and at one point he used the word "funk" to describe the anxiety of citizens regarding the economy. The next day, Clinton's philosophical musings were translated into Gotcha! headlines ("CLINTON PLANS TO LIFT PUBLIC OUT OF 'FUNK' "), and Clinton, like Dole, called a halt to such get-togethers.

For the American voter, the campaign of 1996 was oddly distant—and distancing. In its last weeks, polls dominated the coverage, yet the gap between the candidates yawned so wide that there was less press reliance than in the past on reciting poll numbers. What the polls provided was a context for coverage. Omnipresent polls also meant endless stories about the "stumbling" Dole campaign, which drowned Dole's message. Dole planned to devote the final days of September to advancing his economic plan, starting with a speech in Detroit, but that speech, and its theme, received scant press notice. Instead, the press focus was on judging Dole's performance.

In seeking a ceasefire between the media and the candidates, what would the campaign operatives like to say to the press? "I don't think I'm a credible carrier of that message," Stephanopoulos answered, laughing. But he nevertheless continued, "It's very simple—be reporters, not psychologists. Yes, we spin. Yes, like everyone else, we're not perfect. But it wouldn't hurt to give elected officials a little bit more of the benefit of the doubt. And, in return, maybe we can do the same. Maybe that's the way you deëscalate the spin cycle."

Christina Martin, Dole's deputy press secretary, was both complaining and pleading when she said, in October, that what bugged her about the press was a "lack of empathy." She went on, "Members of the press always plead with us to understand their lives. Every once in a while they need

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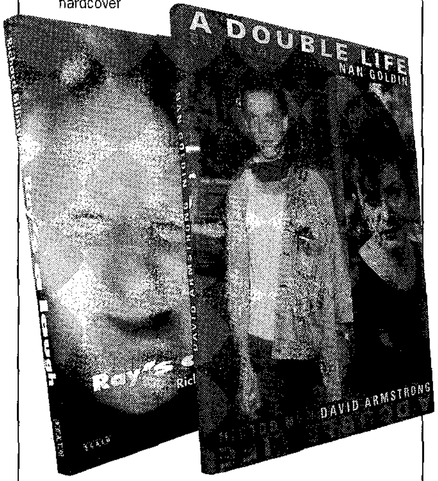

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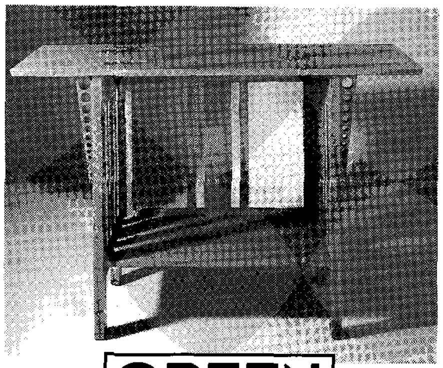

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to turn around and think about the candidates' lives and what they're asking. Things such as acknowledging a certain right to privacy . . . and allowing a certain degree of spontaneity in these candidates' lives—allowing them the flexibility to go home thirty minutes early without reflecting on their health or their state of mind or the condition of the campaign's health. . . . Not everything—every movement, every breath—has a deeper meaning to it."

Buckley believes that in the future reporters will continue to be quarantined, leaving them with even less understanding of the individuals they cover. If the press doesn't end the humorless "gotcha atmosphere" it's created and begin to cut the candidate "a millimetre of slack," he said, then the candidates' "only response will be to slap on a bulletproof vest and try to communicate over the heads of reporters or through them."

McCurry believes that the power of the press will inevitably decline as it becomes easier to circulate information. "There will be a decline of the old media's dominance," he said. "Things will be infinitely more complicated. We are in the twilight of the days where you can control information by giving it to a few newspapers." But such changes also mean that handlers like McCurry will lose their ability to control, say, rumors. "So," McCurry concluded, unhappily, "rumors and access to information lessen our power and lessen the power of the dominant news organizations."

As technology speeds the news cycle, press secretaries routinely brief the wire services and the radio reporters the night before, in order "to get the story moving overnight," McCurry said. "We basically don't let Presidents make announcements anymore." Or if he tells reporters in the morning what the President plans to announce at 2 P.M., that story will circulate immediately and not only go over the wires but be heard on the radio and on the all-news cable channels, leaving print and nightly news editors to think of the 2 P.M. announcement as old news.

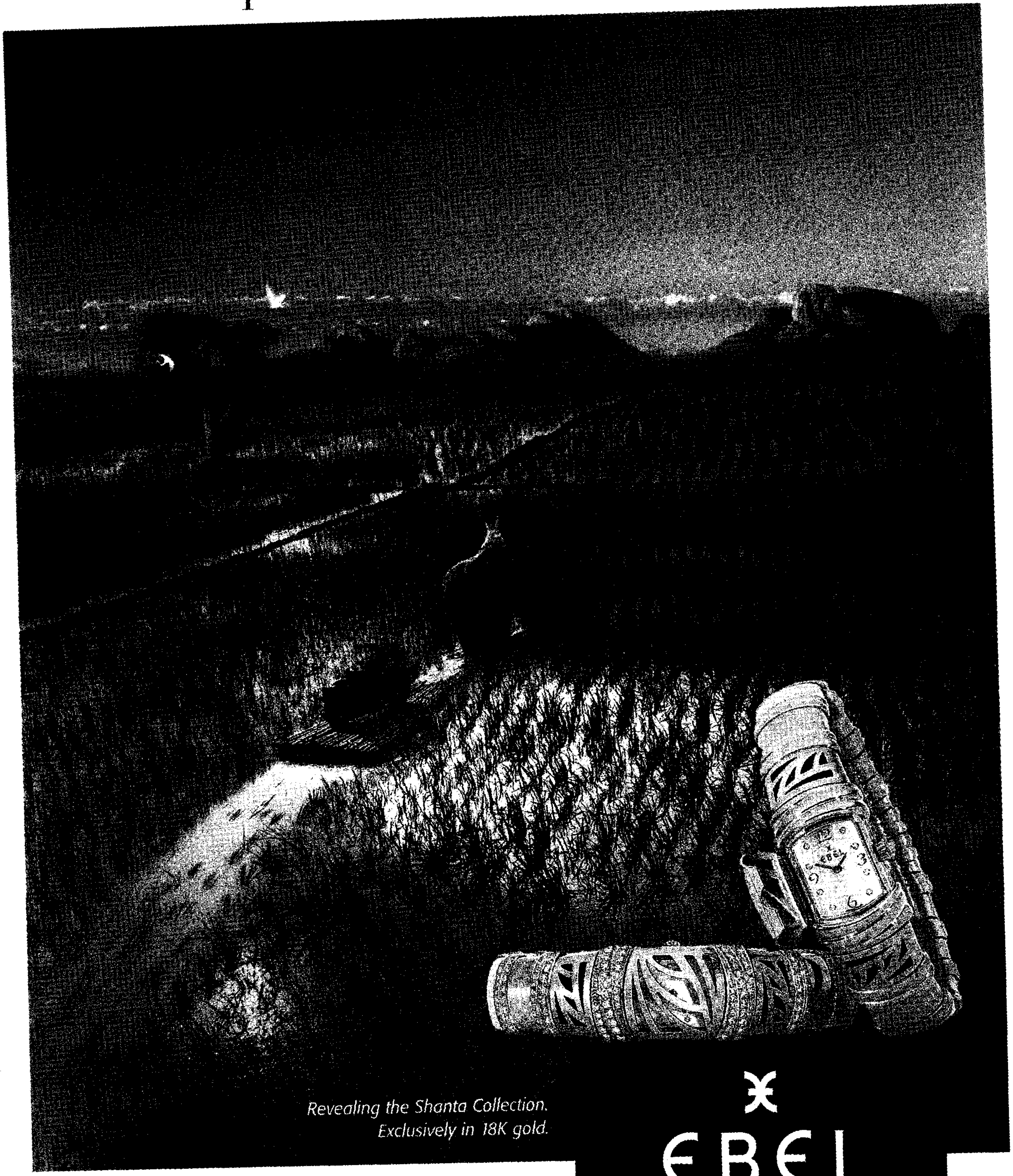
Similarly, McCurry sometimes goes out to the briefing room to slow the news cycle, as he did to stall a rumor that Iraq had fired missiles at American planes in September, or that terrorists had blown up T.W.A. Flight 800 in July. Two enemies of good reporting—thoughtlessness and lack of time—will loom larger. "Everyone feels the pressure for shorthand, everything is about politics," the CNN White House correspondent Claire Shipman said. "That's a convenient way to avoid substance." Shipman, who has a master's degree in international affairs from Columbia University, was covering her first campaign. "Cynicism has been adopted as a way to be seen as fair, as a way to view both sides," she said. "In a larger sense, it's laziness. But no one on this beat is lazy. Everyone works very hard. But there is so much so quickly that there is no time."

ON Election Day, Buckley said that he couldn't imagine working on another campaign. "This is not an experience I'd chalk up as one of the happiest of my life," he told me. "It was very painful to go through a campaign where every day we had to roll a rock up another hill"—that is, try to make an impression on reporters whose frame of reference did not include candidates like Ronald Reagan, who came from behind to win the Presidency in 1980—"and every day it seemed that it rolled right back down again."

The day after the election, McCurry said that this was his last campaign as well. "This is it for me," he said. "I want to quit while I'm ahead." McCurry had one more campaign engaging him, however: his plan to bring about a truce between his client the President and his client the press. He was thrilled that Clinton had chatted with reporters on the way back from Little Rock on Air Force One last Wednesday. When Clinton was pressed about Huang and the Lippo Group and told reporters he'd like to wait until his Friday press conference to answer, the press relented, and McCurry could sense that Clinton was pleasantly surprised.

Will Clinton change his attitude about the press? "Intellectually, he knows it's the right thing to do," McCurry said. "But to do it well he has to feel it in his heart." The press secretary wasn't sure of the outcome, but he was sure that if the press remained hostile to Clinton the Republican majority in Congress would be emboldened to step up its attacks—an argument that ought to appeal to Clinton. "There's not going to be a press honeymoon," McCurry said. "But there's a brief opportunity here to reach a new relationship." ♦

Explore new dimensions in time.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LIFE AND LETTERS

THE FALL OF FUN

When was the last time you did something just for the hell of it?

BY JAMES ATLAS

It's a warm spring night, and I'm at a book party in the handsome wood-panelled bar of the National Arts Club, on Gramercy Park, deep in conversation with a pillow-lipped publicist in a short leather skirt. The glass of champagne I'm holding—my third—is nearly empty. Through the tall windows in the drawing room next door I notice that it's growing dark. I glance at my watch: ten after eight. Time to get home. If I want to see the kids before they're in bed, I'll have to hurry.

A pang of regret comes over me; I want to stay at the party. Not to enact my fantasies about the publicist: my wife, Anna, is a lot more interesting, and I think hitting on younger women (this one must be at least twenty years my junior) is tacky. So what is it I want? The party isn't great; it's a *work* party, a bunch of editors, agents, and writers hustling each other. If it weren't for the glass in my hand, I could be at the office. But something is pulling at me—a sensation that's hard to describe. Maybe it's the pleasurable stirring of sexual attraction without risk, that nerve-tingling aura of possibility accompanied by the knowledge that it's going nowhere. Or maybe I just thirst for a fourth drink. To relax and have—how can I put it?—fun.

There are other kinds of fun, I console myself as I speed in a taxi up the West Side Highway. It's fun to be greeted by cries of "Dad!"; fun to sit at the kitchen table with Anna sharing a late dinner after the kids are asleep; fun (I guess) to watch a few minutes of "Charlie Rose" before collapsing into bed; fun—especially fun—to rise at dawn, flick on my word processor, and get back to work. As the sun rises over Central Park, I'll feel suffused with a sense of well-being, perked up by the adrenaline surge that accompanies perhaps the fiercest desire of all these days—the desire to get ahead.

In the tribe to which I belong—the media, literary, journalism, and arts crowd that's sometimes identified by bilious Republicans as the cultural élite—work dominates our existence. The drunken dinner party, the makeout session in a bathroom at Nell's, the joint inhaled in a taxi full of revellers careering through SoHo at dawn—these are ancient history by now, exotica recorded in some yellowed Jay McInerney novel that's gathering dust on the shelf. If I had to come up with a symbolic representation of the prevailing ethos, it would be a series of red circles, each with a line through it: No Smoking, No Drinking, No Sex. No Fun.

This isn't the way we started out. For my generation, the sixties is what the thirties was for our parents: the decade that formed us. Our mantra was—I quote from the Harvard-Radcliffe Class of 1971 survey, obtained last spring at my twenty-fifth reunion—"Tune in, turn on, and drop LSD!" And most of us did, according to this fascinating document. A Harvard class is not exactly a cross-section, but it does provide a window on the manners and morals of a certain group at a certain time. Sixty per cent of my class smoked marijuana; 15.8 per cent dropped acid. Nearly thirty per cent had between eleven and thirty sexual partners. Even a nerd like me drove a VW bus, got stoned, and listened to "Purple Haze" at earsplitting volume. There was some politics involved, I vaguely recall: we marched and demonstrated; we stood around the gates of factories in a drizzle, passing out leaflets. But mostly we had fun. Timothy Leary was our god.

Actually, I worshipped at another shrine. It wasn't psychedelic San Francisco or mystical Tibet or the muddy fields of Woodstock that lured me; it was the myth of New York literary life. My gurus were the famously hard-drinking literati of an earlier epoch: a shaky, hungover Robert Lowell chain-smoking mentholated Trues at a seminar table in the Quincy House basement; a drunken Norman

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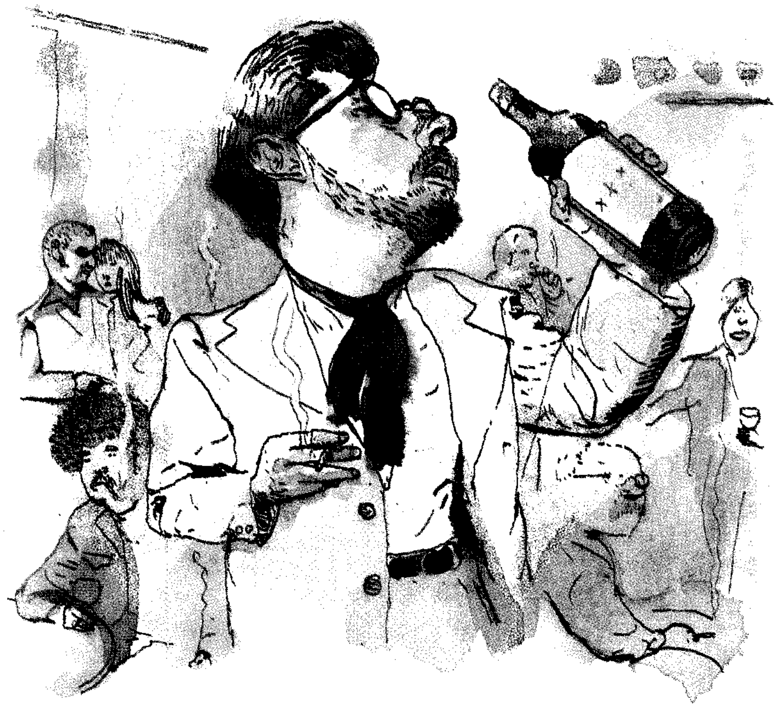
Mailer brandishing a bottle of whiskey and baiting the crowd in Sanders Theatre; Allen Ginsberg toking up at a Signet Society dinner and chanting his poems to the hypnotic accompaniment of a harmonium. Postwar poetry was a hymn of excess, intoxicating in the most literal sense—as evidenced by Ginsberg's "Howl," in which the best minds of his generation "copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed."



Where are the disastrous miscalculations, the squandered opportunities, the wrong turns that made life so picaresque?

BARRY BLITT

Le dérèglement de tous les sens was a venerable tradition, going all the way back to the laudanum-swilling Coleridge. The history of literature seemed at times like one long bender: Hemingway at Sloppy Joe's in Key West, downing icy Daiquiris; Fitzgerald riding up Fifth Avenue on the roof of a taxi and plunging into a fountain. Edmund Wilson's journals "The Twenties," "The Thirties," and "The Forties" recount an exhausting round of debauchery: "Students fucking in the hallways of the Carnegie Tech"; "Big parties at the William Penn hotel where someone hires a room and the guests wander from room to room in a drunken dream"; "Tom Smith left on curbstone with last unattached whore." Even in "The Sixties," the priapic old goat is groping the woman he called "O." on a couch at the Princeton Club. The novels of John Cheever are a virtual lexicon of Martinis and hangovers; Alfred Kazin's "New York Jew" is rife with memories of hipsters "balling" chicks at Greenwich Village parties, and of marathon nights in Isaac Rosenfeld's "dark and madly jammed living room."

It wasn't just Village writers who caroused. Brendan Gill, a chronicler of the *New Yorker* literary set, told me that his crowd "drank a lot and they ate a lot and they stayed up all night and they smoked. At Blake's or Costello's, the room would be deep blue with smoke—a Maxfield Parrish blue." William Styron, in his memoir of Terry Southern in a recent issue of *The Paris Review*, recalls a similar haze, describing a Montparnasse night spot that he and George Plimpton and Peter Matthiessen frequented after the war:

> In the sanitarium of our present smoke-free society it is hard to conceive of the smokiness of that place; the smoke was ice-blue, and almost like a semisolid. You could practically take your finger and carve your initials in it. It was smoke with a searing, promiscuous smell, part Gauloises and Gitanes, part Lucky Strikes, part the rank bittersweet odor of pot.

I ARRIVED in New York in the late seventies—just in time to catch the tail end of that era. Roger W. Straus, the founder of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, was still holding huge, noisy parties on the parlor floor of his town house, on East Seventieth Street. I don't remember any furniture to speak of, just a bar and a long banquet table piled high with food; as I climbed the stairs, glimpsing at the top a cluster of lit. heroes—Dwight Macdonald, Bernard Malamud, Harold Brodkey, all dead now—to be young was very heaven.

Parties were still parties then. Now they're official functions—black-tie galas at some cavernous public space like Lincoln Center or the Winter Garden or Grand Central Terminal. And you can't just *go:* you have to be on the guest list. Are you famous enough to be a Literary Lion and host a table at the New York Public Library fund-raiser? Do you pick up the society page of the *Times* one Sunday morning in April and realize you've been dropped from the annual PEN gala? These dinners are lavish, catered affairs, with the same white linen and bamboo chairs that are trotted out for high-society events; no longer do we sit around the table at a friend's apartment until 3 A.M. amid a clutter of empty wine bottles.

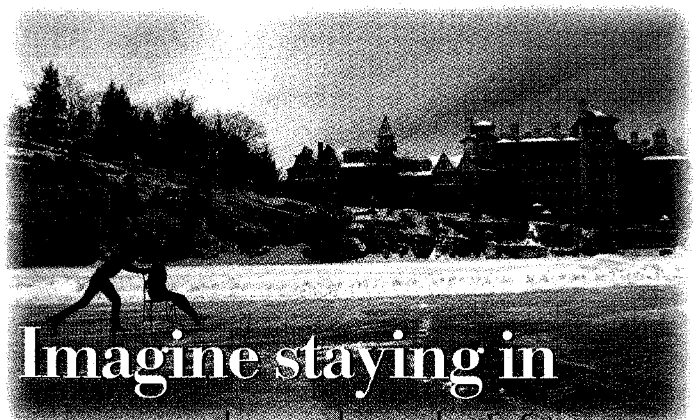
It isn't this way in Europe, where business is a form of socializing, not the other way around. "If you meet an editor for lunch here," a New York writer who lives in Paris says, "it's considered inappropriate, even rude, not to spend two hours at the table and finish off a bottle of wine." In New York, people start glancing nervously at their watches after an hour; by two o'clock in the afternoon, the Four Seasons dining room is deserted. As for whiling away the afternoon in a café, forget it. "You go to Starbucks to get revved up with your caffeine fix and run out the door with your takeout in a brown paper bag," Shelley Wanger, an editor at Pantheon, told me. "If you see some lonely soul sitting there, you think, Who's this weirdo?"

It's not just life outside the office that isn't as freewheeling as it used to be. When I started out as a staff writer at *Time*, nearly twenty years ago, the magazine's Friday-night "close" was marked by the arrival of a fully stocked bar, rolled in by a white-jacketed waiter. The editor of the book department got out his guitar. "I gather that there used to be this leisure time when you'd wander around the corridors and bat around ideas," Wanger said. "Now everyone's in endless 'features' meetings, or sitting in their offices trying to buy the big book."

I'M forty-seven, a little young to be glazing over the old days with the memoirist's thick palette of nostalgia. Besides, a younger generation has emerged (it always does) which persists in having a good time. Through the dim smudge of my bifocals I study an invitation from a downtown literary journal called *Open City*, for a party in a loft near Canal Street. It starts at nine o'clock. I'm about as likely to venture south of Fifty-ninth Street at that hour as to set out on a dogsled expedition through the Arctic tundra. But the anecdotal evidence suggests that writers and artists in their twenties and early thirties continue to fire up unfiltered Camels, drink nearly as much as we once did, and have sex (though I hear that even the women carry condoms). I see them at office parties, dancing to zydeco bands; afterward, they head off to the Tenth Street Lounge or some other exotic venue.

But something *has* changed in the culture. One of the powerful myths I grew up with was the myth of the bourgeoisie v. the artist—the idea that there existed a beefy, philistine middle class (it was depicted in the novels of Sinclair Lewis and John O'Hara which I devoured as a boy), whose members both admired and belittled artists and writers. Saul Bellow's two older brothers were Chicago real-estate dealmakers—*machers*, in the vernacular. As far as they were concerned (until he made a bundle on "Herzog"), their brother was "a dreamer." Art was an indulgence, and America was run by "hard-headed men of business, chairmen of boards, directors of research, politicians, and lovers of naked reality," as Bellow described his brothers and their ilk.

Artists, in this scheme of things, were freaks. "She was sort of ahead of her time," a childhood friend of the novelist Shirley Jackson told her biographer. "More like the sixties generation than we were. We were sort of squarish. She did things we didn't do, like smoking." A suburban girl from an affluent Wasp home, Jackson married the brilliant, fat, chain-smoking critic Stanley Edgar Hyman and established a famously chaotic household, first in New York and later in North Bennington, Vermont, which became known in the forties and fifties as a nest of drunkenness, adultery, and general mischief-making. It was almost as if



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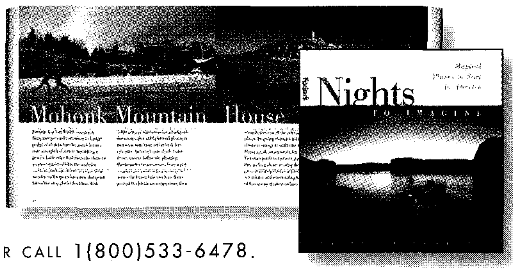

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HINDSIGHT

The two of us running up Fifth Avenue,
Michael, a long leap of a lad
in his black church clothes
and his brother's brogues,
and his hair flying,

and me with my brimmed hat hooping
down the steps of St. Pat's
till it's cocked on the wind's head,
bent on blowing me clean
out of my senses.

Oh, why did I let that boy go?
God himself loved the sight of us.
I would be the blue light in his eye,
the left one, the farseeing one,
the one he's rubbing now, maybe.

—Nancy Willard

Flaubert's dictum that the artist should live an orderly life and be daring in his art had been reversed: Be daring in your life and write sonnets like John Berryman.

This idea fuelled the hangovers of a whole generation. Writers and artists wrecked their health, destroyed their marriages, and died young so that the rest of America could enjoy art from a safe distance. The sacrifice had to be made. It was their job. Surely this was the lesson of Hemingway blowing his brains out, of Jackson Pollock wrapping his car around a tree. They died that art might live.

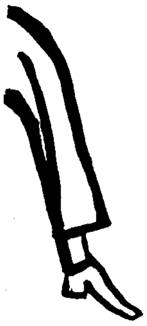
The myth still flourishes: witness Julian Schnabel's début film, "Basquiat," in which the sensitive young artist is undone by the capitalist vultures of the New York art world. Yet you feel, watching the film, how seductive the world of agents and dealers and publicists has become. In a way, Basquiat is the least interesting person in the movie. The real movers and shakers are the merchandisers. Culture itself has become a business. Successful artists don't live in cold-water flats and drink at the Cedar Tavern, the way Pollock and de Kooning did; they're marketing their own work. And not just Jeff Koons, either: like Schnabel, Robert Longo and David Salle make movies, too. They're entrepreneurs, impresarios of art. Their model is Andy Warhol, the artist as conglomerate.

The same goes for writers: half the novelists I know are writing for TV or hawking scripts in Hollywood. Others write movie-friendly books. And Francis Ford Coppola has decided to fund a literary magazine, *Zoetrope:* could it be that he's interested in obtaining potential movie properties? No one proudly makes ends meet by selling review copies to the secondhand bookshops, as Bellow did in his early days; no writers hang around cafeterias, like the old *Partisan Review* gang, who lingered for hours over a cup of cold coffee at Horn & Hardart. If you don't have a six-figure deal by the time you're thirty-five, you've failed. In fact, why even *be* a writer? Some of the most talented literary people I know—people who studied Latin and Greek, who read the *TLS* and can tell you the plot of "Titus Andronicus"—are agents.

So we have lawyers and accountants to manage the corporations that we've become: Erica Jong Productions, Ltd.; James Atlas, Inc. But whatever happened to the character-building struggle to find your voice—to find out who you are? Where are the disastrous miscalculations, the squandered opportunities, the wrong turns that made life so picaresque and hairy?

Reading Paul Fussell's new memoir, "Doing Battle: The Making of a Skeptic," I was struck by the urgency, the death-hauntedness of his early life: I wonder if it isn't our freedom from the prospect of imminent extinction that's made us so cautious. Like the writers of the so-called Lost Generation, who had fought in the First World War, Fussell found himself on the front lines at the age of twenty. He went to Harvard *after* being machine-gunned by Krauts, and when a famous scholar urged him to "live your literature" Fussell had reason to know what he meant. Now literature is a career choice, a minor branch of the content-provider industry. By the standards of Fussell's day, we're Rotarians. We have book advances and expense accounts and Keogh plans. And nothing makes it harder to have fun than having a lot to lose.

In our asset-greedy era, we've become living embodiments of the phenomenon described in Christopher Lasch's classic, "The Culture of Narcissism": he called it "the invasion of play by the rhetoric of achievement." Our circuits are so overloaded by the technology that keeps us wired—the cell phones and modems and fax machines—that we've lost the capacity to daydream. We're drowning in data. "A professor in California," Bellow observed in 1990, "has estimated that on an average weekday the New York *Times* contains more information than any contemporary of Shakespeare would have acquired in a lifetime." No more wandering lonely as a cloud: we have to log on and get our E-mail. Even vacations are work—attending tennis clinics and cooking schools, climbing Mt. Everest. I try not to go anywhere without an assignment from *Travel & Leisure:* why just sit on the beach when you can take notes on a walking tour of the Lake Poets' haunts? Leonard Woolf called one of his memoirs "The Journey Not the Arrival Matters." I journey to arrive at a five-thousand-word piece: I've dragged my family all over Scotland on the trail of Boswell and Johnson; I've rented a house in Lucca to chronicle it as the new literary mecca. I never read a book anymore just to read it; I lug around galleys, manuscripts, books to blurb. To everything there is a purpose. I have friends who can lecture you until your eyelids droop on their wine cellars full of Château Margaux (they don't drink it—they just collect it), who listen to "Middlemarch" on audiotape while they're working out on the treadmill.



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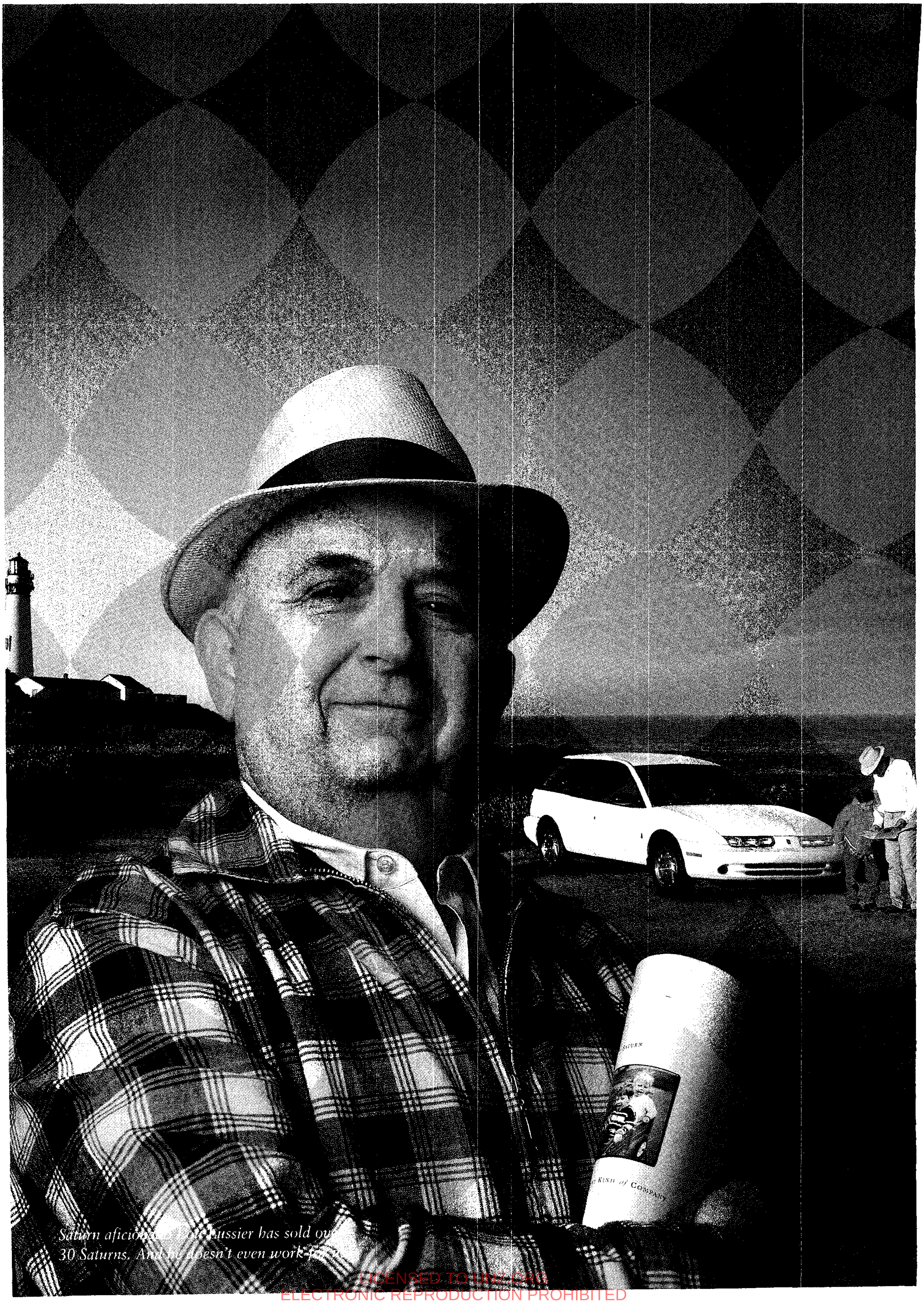
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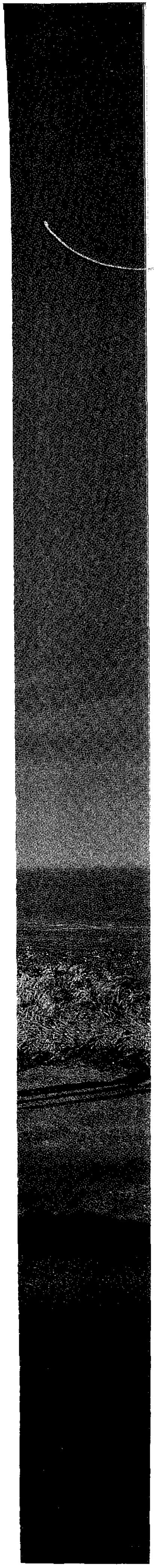

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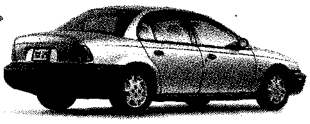

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ily life. That we have conventional families at all is startling. If you were to list the ten foremost postwar novelists and critics in America and the number of spouses they racked up, you'd arrive at a ratio of something like 1 to 3.4: Mailer, six; Mary McCarthy, four; Irving Howe, three; and so on, down to the rigidly uxorious Bernard Malamud, with one. But the writing life isn't what it once was; we're yuppies now. Our lives feel more like an episode of "thirtysomething" than like one of those dark marital dramas which McCarthy and Edmund Wilson were always writing about each other. "Their penultimate quarrel," McCarthy wrote in "A Charmed Life," her thinly disguised account of their life together,

> had exploded in the middle of the night, after a party, when she was carrying two overflowing pails of garbage and he refused, with a sardonic bow, to hold open the screen door for her. There she was, manifestly the injured party, but instead of leaving it at that, and taxing him with it the next day, when he was weakened with a hangover, she immediately distributed the guilt by setting down one pail of garbage and slapping him.

"Our life—though we also had a great deal of fun—was sometimes absolutely nightmarish," Wilson wrote later. The nightmarish part I can believe. Also the fun.

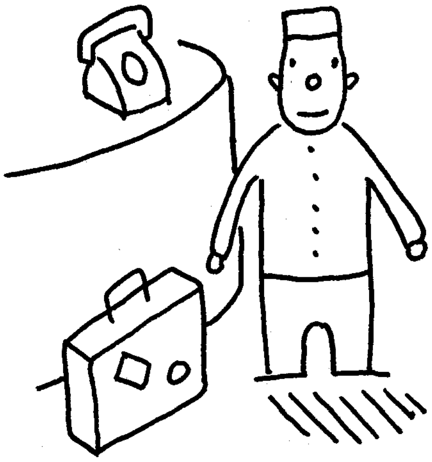
And what about the children? "I think it is hard on Reuel to wreck the family in the middle of the summer like this," Wilson wrote McCarthy, fretting about their son, when they were on the verge of splitting up. After the summer was a different story. In memoirs of the period, children are always being shunted off to camp, put on buses and trains to visit the estranged parent, shipped out to relatives in the boonies somewhere.

Our children, on the other hand, are always with us. We shuttle them back and forth between school and play dates, and they're almost as harried as we are, with their drama workshops, cello lessons, and French tutoring. The luxuriously vacant days chronicled so vividly in Frank Conroy's "Stop-Time," about a childhood steeped in idleness—practicing the yo-yo, canoodling on the piano, reading moldy old books—have gone the way of the rotary telephone.

Needless to say, being a parent in this child-obsessed day—and it doesn't matter whether you're a freelance writer or a corporate lawyer—isn't conducive to romance. In the literature of the fifties and sixties, marriage and parenthood were complex, perilous enterprises, charged with passionate intensity. Robert Lowell recalled his tempestuous marriage to Jean Stafford as both a bruising and a cozy affair; one winter in Maine, they were "snowbound together, / simmering like wasps / in our tent of books." And the compulsively philandering men and women in John Updike's "Couples" didn't lose their sexual edge just because they were married and had a houseful of kids. They bedded each other—lovers *and* spouses—with lubricious fervor. "She seemed his whore. She crouched and whimpered above him, her nipples teasing his lips. She went down on him purring; she was a minx"—thus Harold and Marcia, man and wife.

Now marriage is a "partnership," in which mutual time-management has become as important as passion. ("You have sex twice per week, which you describe as satisfactory," the Harvard-Radcliffe survey informs me.) But maybe what we miss is not so much the drunken, half-random sex as the spontaneity, the inconsequential hours that gave life its accidental charm: when was the last time a friend just dropped by and stayed for dinner? When was the last time you lay on the couch with your feet up, reading a novel? The most evocative contemporary portrait of domestic life I've read lately was a story by Helen Simpson in *Granta* about a young couple going nuts trying to raise their two kids. When Jonathan, lying in bed beside Frances after the children are finally down for the night, makes a reference to "Jude the Obscure," she hisses, "You've been reading! *When* did you read!" That's Harold and Marcia in the nineties.

Hardly anyone has affairs anymore. One hoary editor of my acquaintance ducks out of the office on Friday afternoons to meet a fact checker he picked up at a cocktail party, and returns hours later full of red-faced cheer, addressing everyone as "Captain." But he's sixty, a fossil imprinted with now forbidden attitudes. The *cinq-à-sept*—as the French refer to the swift adulterous liaison—has given way to quality time. "Sex just gets in the way," one high-powered literary agent told me. "It's messy, dangerous, and who has time for it anyway?"



We've put a low premium on the subversive, the daring—what Kant called "negative pleasures." Peter N. Stearns, in "American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style," has given a name—a somewhat cumbersome one—to this phenomenon; he calls it "anti-intensity emotionology." Our society, Stearns argues, has deliberately constructed a low-key, unromantic code of conduct in order to conserve its energy. Our anti-emotional style conforms to "the requirements of a corporate, service-oriented economy and management structure; small family size, with emphasis on leisure and sexual compatibility between spouses; consumerism; and anxiety about hidden forces within the body that might be disturbed by emotional excess." In other words, Just say no.

So pervasive is this anti-intensity that it has seeped into our characters. The temperamental, "difficult" person has become a rarity in New York literary life. No one quits a job anymore after hurling an inkwell at the boss, the way Joseph Mitchell did at the old *Herald Tribune;* no one throws a tantrum over his editor's excision of some strong language, as Hemingway once did. We adapt, bevelling our rough edges smooth. "Psychotherapy is part of this," Linda Healey, an editor at Pantheon, suggested to me. "We're all supposed to be tooled up, brought into line. Quirks, oddities, obsessions used to be part of character; they were what made us interesting. Now they're liabilities. The emphasis is on performance: can you get it up, can you make it, can you clear the bar?"

How did this happen? Where did the fun go? A lot of it has to do with money. We're working more because we have to work more; this is an economic fact. It hasn't escaped my notice that people in their fifties and sixties and seventies—even the writers—have somehow contrived to inhabit entire New York town houses while our second child still occupies what in more genteel times was called the maid's room. A dis-

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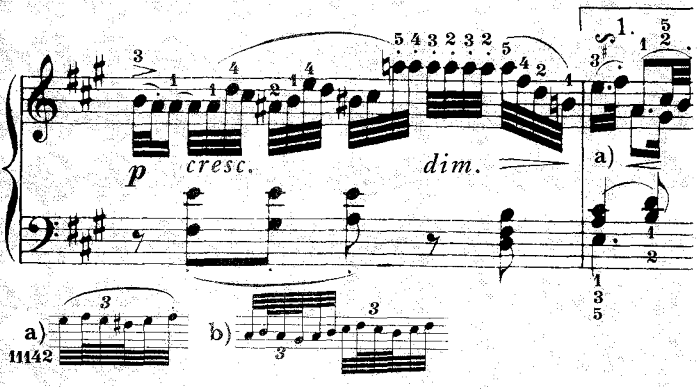
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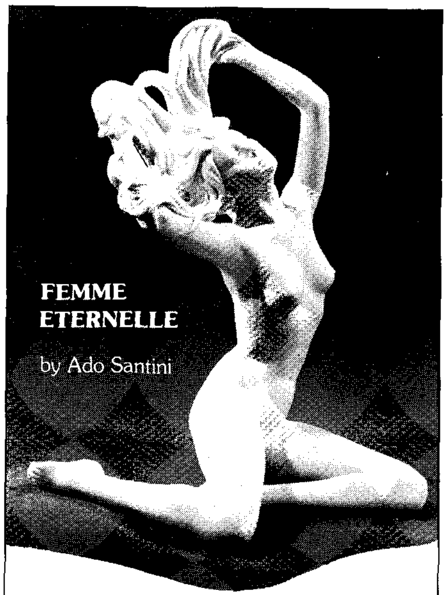

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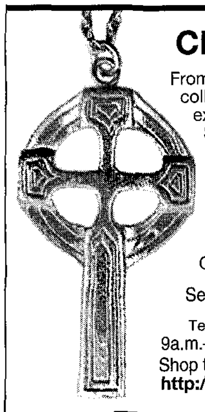

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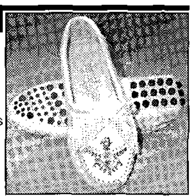

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proportionate number of elderly Harvard professors own enviable gray-shingled summer houses on Cape Cod. And—it's probably not polite to say this—how come Jules Feiffer gets to summer on Martha's Vineyard? The answer is simple: real estate used to be cheaper. "I was able to buy a house in the most fashionable section of New York City for about nineteen thousand dollars—it's worth at least two million today," Brendan Gill told me. Calvin Trillin has owned the same house in the Village since 1969. "I didn't have any inherited wealth, but it was possible to lead a middle-class existence in those days," he said. "And there were some huge rent-controlled places. You could pull it off."

Writers of a certain age wax lyrical on how far the dollar used to stretch. The nickel subway has gone to a dollar-fifty, Gill observes. Lunch at Grand Ticino, on Thompson Street—"the same meal you get today"—was sixty cents. Saul Bellow is fond of quoting Isaac Rosenfeld's axiom that in the old days it didn't cost as much to be poor.

The postwar generation so vividly evoked by William Barrett in his memoir "The Truants" wasn't "chained to the wheel of career and profession," he writes. "We could abandon ourselves to the delight of irrelevant studies." In those days, a writer armed with a Guggenheim went off to Paris and lived for a year on two thousand dollars. (Now you get about twenty-eight thousand, and use it to pay your kids' tuition.) If you did have a job, like the soon-to-be-famous critics at *Time*—James Agee and Irving Howe—it was to finance your *real* job, writing your own stuff. No one aspired to climb the masthead. "It's stupid to talk about selling out," as the poet Howard Nemerov put it with his usual acerbity. "Who's buying?"

The fact is that in better economic times Nemerov had the luxury of not selling out: if you screwed up in some spectacular way, if your marriage fell apart, you could always retreat to academe. (That's what Mary McCarthy did.) But throw an artistic tantrum now and you're liable to end up on the street, a casualty of corporate downsizing. Book publishing and the magazine business have gone the way of the health-care industry, joining the rest of America in its joyless profit grind. These days, even literary novelists have to "earn out."

Thirty years ago, Jason Epstein wrote an article for *The New York Review of Books* in which he made the case that in order to enjoy a comfortable life in Manhattan—private schools, a decent apartment, a modest summer place—you needed fifty thousand dollars a year if you lived on the East Side and twenty-five thousand dollars if you lived on the West Side. Everyone was outraged: Whom was Epstein talking about? No one even knew anyone who had that much money.

What do you need now? I called up Epstein for a new number. "Many times that," he said warily. Three hundred and fifty thousand? I ventured. "That seems right." And what does that princely sum buy? A standard prewar six (on the *West* Side), tuition for two children in private school, the modest summer place Epstein stipulated, a full-time nanny, and the assurance that when you have a hole in your second pair of loafers you can come up with thirty-seven bucks for new soles at Drago Shoe Repair. (You probably can't afford a car, even though your parents had two in the garage.)

Sometimes I wonder what's to stop us from discovering our own bohemian paradise. Why not move to the factory zone in Williamsburg with the young, struggling artists and declare it the new SoHo? Because there's no Balducci's out there, for chrissake, nowhere to get ready-made pesto. And the J train doesn't accept car vouchers. Why not admit it? We don't *want* to be struggling anymore. Whether we've made it or not, we're supposed to live as if we have.

IT'S not just the money culture that's made us anhedonic. The fact that certain indulgences have been proscribed for health reasons may help explain the institutionalized hostility to pleasure in our culture. In his brilliant book "Cigarettes Are Sublime," Richard Klein writes, "We are in the midst of one of those periodic moments of repression, when the culture, descended from Puritans, imposes its hysterical visions and enforces its guilty constraints on society, legislating moral judgments under the guise of public health, all the while enlarging the power of surveillance and the reach of censorship to achieve a general restriction of freedom." Klein, a professor of French literature at Cornell who's making a modest name for himself *epaté*-ing the bourgeois, has also taken on gluttony, publishing a satirical cover story in *The New Republic* on our national obsession with fat. According to Klein, "healthism" is a defense against our own rampant impulses toward excess—a guilty lashing out at the very things we most desire. "America, under the spur of its persistent Puritanism, cruelly medicalized the pleasures it most permanently indulges—turning every mild narcotic, even art, into a matter of public health and social morality."

Clearly, there's something to be said for this New Puritanism. Bohemian excess was lethal. "I'm cross with god who has wrecked this generation," lamented John Berryman, who killed himself at fifty-eight. Delmore Schwartz died in a fleabag hotel at the age of fifty-two. Randall Jarrell was, some say, a suicide at fifty-one. Lowell survived the longest, dying of a heart attack at sixty in a New York taxi, en route from his third wife, Caroline Blackwood, back to his second, Elizabeth Hardwick. "There was a time when nobody lived past sixty," Brendan Gill recalled, ticking off his late colleagues at *The New Yorker*: Harold Ross, Robert Benchley, Wolcott Gibbs, the notorious gourmand A. J. Liebling. He might have added Shirley Jackson, who died at forty-six, and her gluttonous husband, who died of a heart attack at fifty-one.

"Happy people don't have to have fun," Jean Stafford liked to say. Stafford, a diehard self-destructivist of the old school, succumbed to alcoholism and emphysema at sixty-four. She and her contemporaries messed up their lives and died—literally—for their sins. But they risked pain in pursuit of a more ambiguous pleasure: the pleasure of living fully. They took seriously the admonition of Lambert Strether to Little Bilham in Henry James's "The Ambassadors": "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to." For them, this kind of pleasure—or, to put it in a different way, an openness to experience, a willingness to wing it—stood high as a goal, however unattainable. It was a world, to invoke a Cheever image, where people drank Martinis, the radio in the cigar store on the corner played jazz, and all the men wore hats.

Brendan Gill likes to recite a couplet by Edna St. Vincent Millay, a party girl who enjoyed her drink (too much; she died at fifty-eight) and who once made love to Edmund Wilson and the poet John Peale Bishop on a couch at the same time:

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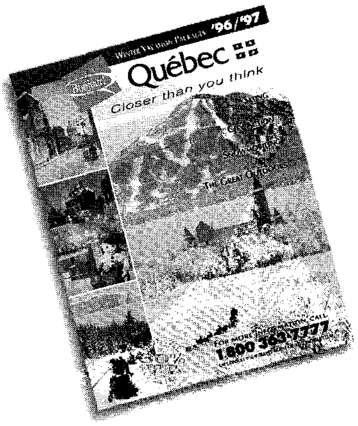

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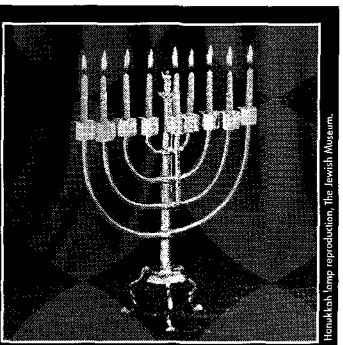

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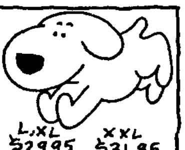

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PERSONAL HISTORY

NOTES ON MY MOTHER

A son's fascination with an unexplained woman.

BY HILTON ALS

UNTIL the end, my mother never discussed her way of being. She avoided explaining the impetus behind her emigration from Barbados to New York. She avoided explaining that she had not been motivated by the same desire for opportunity which drove most female immigrants but instead had followed a man whom she had known in Barbados as her first and only husband's closest friend—a man who eventually became my father. She was silent about the fact that she had left her husband, by whom she had two daughters, after he returned to Barbados from the Second World War addicted to morphine, and that, having been married once, she refused to marry again. She was also silent about the fact that my father, who had grown up relatively rich in Barbados, had emigrated to America with his two sisters and his mother—women with whom he continued to live, throughout my childhood, in a brownstone in Brooklyn. My mother never discussed how she would visit my father in his room there, at night, and afterward sneak back to her own home and her six children, four of them produced by her union with my father: two girls and two boys. She never explained the bond that they shared, a bond so deep and mysterious that we children felt forever excluded from their love, and forever diminished by it.

My mother also never told me whether she recognized or understood where my fascination with her would take me, a boy of seven, and eight, and ten: to a dark crawl space behind her closet, where I put on her hosiery one leg at a time, my heart racing, and, over the hose, my jeans and sneakers, so that I could have her, what I so admired and coveted, near me, always. As a Negress—for that was what she called herself—my mother was powerful in her silence, and for years she silently watched me, her first son, try to emulate her forbearance. She avoided discussing what that forbearance was worth.

Marie Als in the early fifties; the author adored, coveted, and emulated her.

DARRYL TURNER

FOR years before and after her death, I tried to absorb my mother by referring to myself as a Negress, and by living the prescribed life of an auntie man, which is what Barbadians call a faggot. I socialized myself as an auntie man long before I committed my first act as one. I had four older sisters, and I also wore their clothes when they were not home; the clothes relieved some of the pressure I felt at being different from them. My mother responded to the Negress inside me with pride and anger: pride because I identified with women like herself; anger because I identified with women at all. When I was five or six years old, we were sitting on a bench in the subway station near our building, and seated not far from us was a woman my mother knew from the neighborhood, with her teen-age son. My mother did not speak to this woman, because she did not approve of the woman's son, who, like me, was a Negress. Unlike me, he dressed the part. He was wearing black shoes with princess heels, flesh-colored hose through which dark hairs sprouted, a lemon-yellow shift with grease stains on it, a purple head scarf, and bangles. He carried a strapless purse, from which he removed a compact and lipstick, so that he could dress his face, too. As my mother looked at that boy, she brushed my eyes closed with the back of her hand, and she hissed the words "auntie man." I've never known whether she was referring to both of us.

Did my mother call herself a Negress as a way of wryly reconciling herself to that most hated of English colonial words, which fixed her as a servant in the eyes of Britain and of God? I don't think so; she was not especially interested in Britain or in history. My mother was capricious in her views about most things, including race. As a West Indian who lived among other West Indians, she did not feel "difference"; in her community, she was in the majority. She dropped her West Indian accent a few years after she became a United States citizen, in the early nineteen-fifties. She didn't like people who capitalized on being exotic. She didn't like accents in general. She lived in America and wanted to sound like an American, which she did, unless she was angry. She was capable of giving a nod toward the history of "injustice," but only if it suited her mood. I think my mother took some pleasure in the embarrassment that white and black Americans alike felt when she called herself a Negress, since their image of her, she thought, was largely sentimental, heavy with suffering. When my mother laughed in the face of their deeply presumptuous view of her, one of her front teeth flashed gold.

My mother's lack of interest in politics freed her mind for other things, like her endless ill health, which she treated as though it were a protracted form of suicide. She first became sick when my father fell in love with someone else and her thirty-year love affair with him ended. The difference between my mother and my father's new girlfriend was this: the new woman consented to live with my father while my mother had not. (After my mother refused to marry him, in the early fifties, my father never asked her again.) When my mother became ill with one thing and another, I was eight; by the time she died, I was twenty-eight. I was so lonely knowing her; she was so busy dying.

My mother was always polite, even at the end. For a long time, she imposed her will by not telling anyone what was really wrong; this kept everyone poised and at her service. She would not speak of the facts that contributed to her dying. She was quietly determined, functional, and content in her depression; she would not have forfeited her sickness for anything, since it had taken her so many years to admit to her need for attention, and being ill was one way of getting it. When diabetes cost her one of her legs, she said politely, "Oh, I'm dying now." When they removed a lymph node in her neck as a test for something, she said politely, "Oh, I'm really dying now." When her kidneys failed and a machine functioned in their place, she was still polite. She said, "Well, I'm dying." When she lost the vision in one eye, when, eventually, she could not breathe without effort, when her blood pressure was abnormally high and her teeth were bad and she could not urinate or take sugar in her tea or eat pork or remember a conversation, she remembered these two things: that she was polite and that she was dying.

One of my aunts told me that my mother encountered my father's girlfriend once, on the street, and took a good look at her. She saw a certain resemblance between herself and this woman: they were both homely but spirited, like Doris Day. It was clear to my mother that, like her, this woman would be capable of withstanding my father's tantrums, his compulsive childishness, and his compulsive lying. I think the resemblance my mother saw between herself and my father's new girlfriend shattered any claim to originality that she had. In the end, I think my mother's long and public illness was the only thing she experienced as an accomplishment, as something separate from her roles as mother, lover, Negress. And it was.

Certain facts about my mother's religious, cultural, culinary, sexual, and literary interests: She attended Sunday services at St. George's Episcopal Church, a Gothic structure in the

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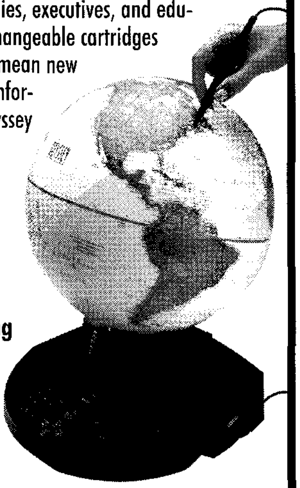

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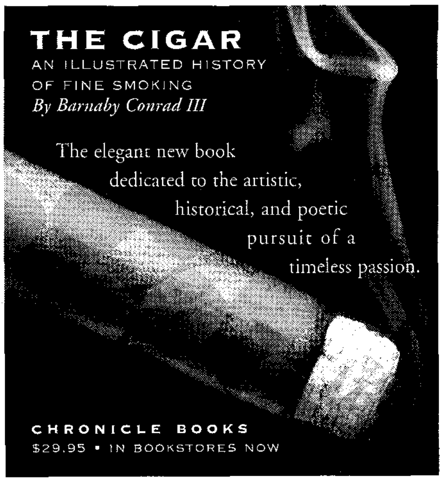
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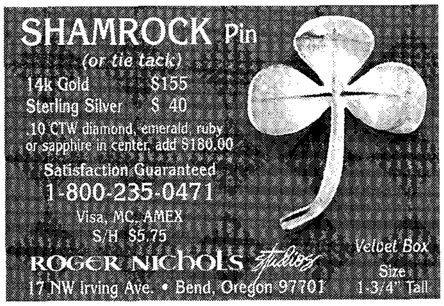
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Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, surrounded by brownstones, vacant lots, and children. The congregation was largely West Indian, and was judgmental of my mother because she had chosen not to marry my father, while she did choose to have his children. Many of the women in that congregation had had children out of wedlock as well, but they judged my mother just the same, because she wasn't bitter about not being married. At St. George's, my mother sometimes sang, in her sweet, reedy voice, "I Surrender All," her favorite hymn.

My mother wanted to be different from her own mother, who had always been a bitter woman, but she avoided contradicting my grandmother when she said things like "Don't play in the sun. You are black enough"—which is what my grandmother said to me once. My mother attempted to separate herself from her parents and siblings by being "nice," which they weren't. An early memory of this: My mother's family sitting in a chartered bus as it rained outside during a family picnic; my mother, alone, in the rain, cleaning up the mess as my great-aunt said, "Marie is one of God's own," and my heart breaking as the bus rocked with derisive laughter.

She loved the foods of her country: *sous*, blood pudding, coconut bread, *coucou*. She enjoyed her own mother most when her mother prepared those foods for her on special occasions: birthdays, Christmas, wakes. She herself was a mediocre cook who pretended to be better at it than she was by preparing elaborate meals from French cookbooks. I learned to cook in reaction to the meals she prepared.

She was in love with my father until she died; they spoke every day on the telephone. They amused and angered each other. She called him Cyp, which was short for Cyprian, his given name. When he said her name, Marie, he said it in a thick Bajan accent, so that the "a" was very flat. In his mouth, her name sounded like this: "*Ma*-ree."

My mother was bright and had a high-school education, but she saw clearly that her passport to the world was restricted. Over the years, in Brooklyn, she worked as a housekeeper, as a hairdresser in a beauty salon, and as a teacher's assistant in a nursery school. My mother told one story about being a servant among the Jews when she was a young woman and new to America. With other women her age, she would go to the Flatbush section of Brooklyn and wait on a particular street corner for people—mostly Jews—to drive by in their big cars, from which they would look out to see which of the women seemed healthy and clean enough to do day work in their homes. "We called ourselves Daily Woikers," my mother said, in a Yiddish-American accent, laughing.

She called the hair salon where she worked "the shop." It was frequented by Negresses. I went there after school. At the shop, my mother wore a white smock. She straightened hair and rubbed bergamot into women's scalps. She listened to women talk all day. After a while, their problems became pretty general to her. People complained, no matter what; she learned that for some people complaining was a way of being. After a while, she didn't respond to her customers' problems; she knew that they didn't really want a solution. The more my mother heard, the more impersonal she became in her support and encouragement of everyone. She addressed most of those women as "honey," because, after a while, she couldn't remember their names.

WE lived, for many years, in a two-story brownstone with a narrow stairway, in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. The Schwartzes, the elderly Jewish couple who owned the building, lived below us. Sometimes my brother and I would watch television with the Schwartzes. I marvelled at the orderliness of Mr. and Mrs. Schwartz's home, the strange smells, and the candles that they burned on Friday nights. I loved them. I wanted to be a Jew. I told Mrs. Schwartz that I wanted to be a Jew, but how? One day, when I was with my mother, Mrs. Schwartz stopped her on that narrow stairway to tell her that I wanted to be a Jew. I was ten. My mother looked at me. She told Mrs. Schwartz that I wanted to be a *writer*. Shortly afterward, Mrs. Schwartz gave me a gift. It was a typewriter that

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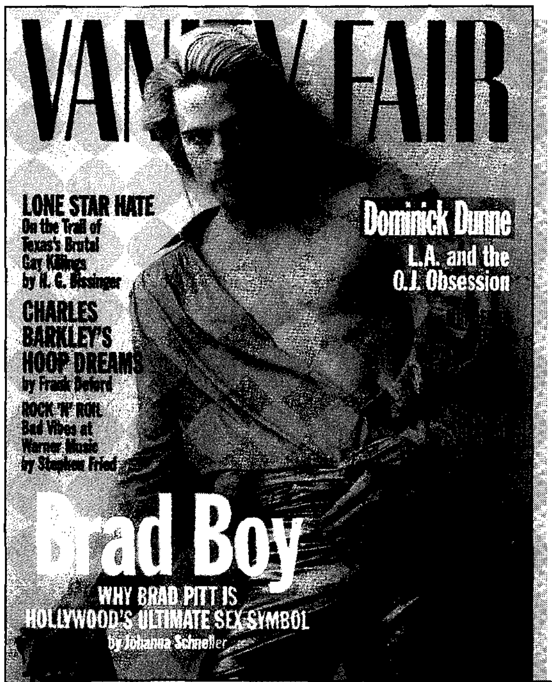
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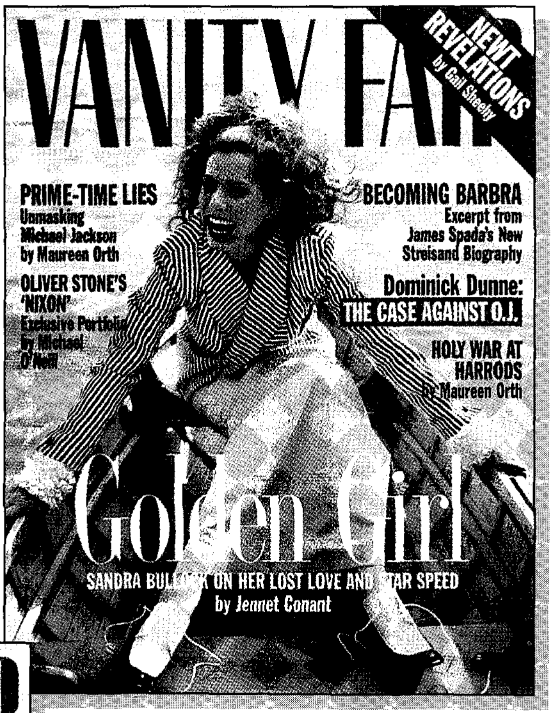
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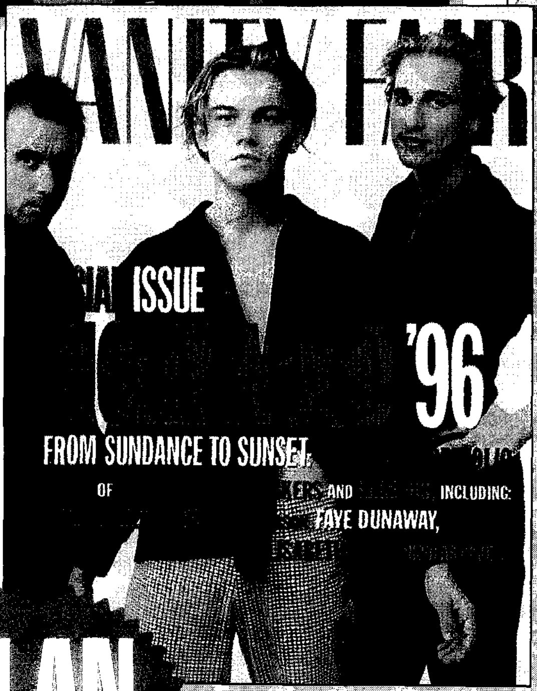
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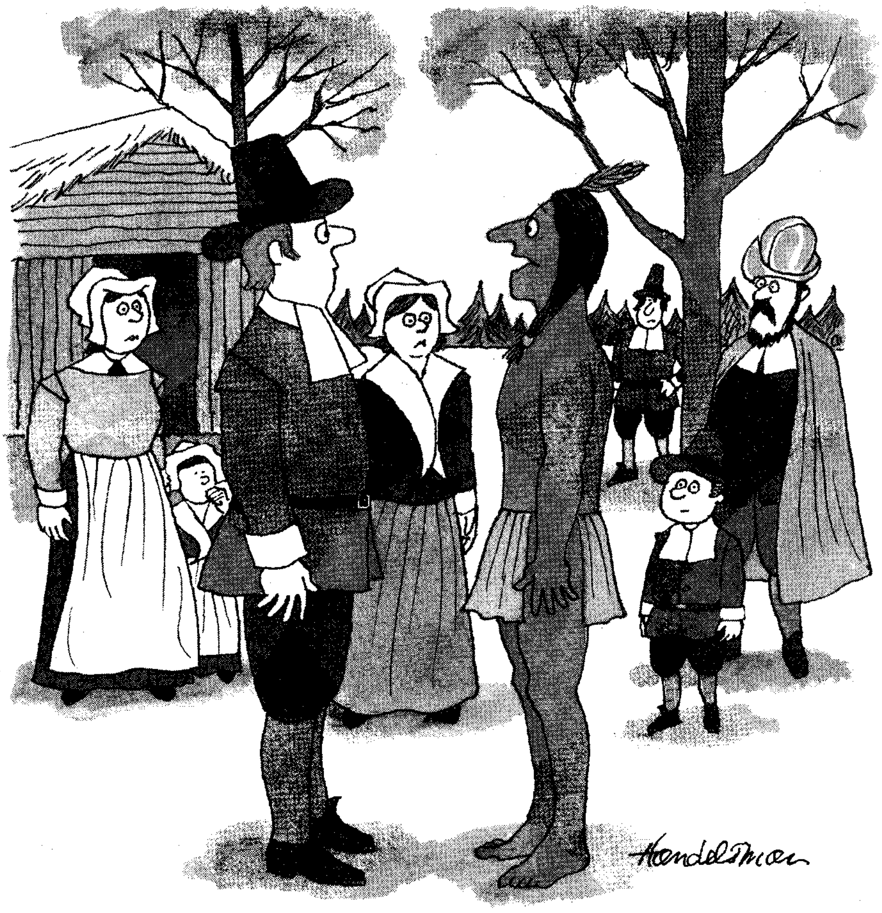

"You just show up here illegally and expect us to tell you about corn?"

• •

had belonged to her son, the Doctor.

My mother was not ambitious for her children, but she was supportive of their ambitions. After I decided to be a writer, my mother gave me writing tablets at Christmas; she also gave me books to read that she bought at the Liberation Bookshop, on Nostrand Avenue in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. The books were almost always novels or collections of poems, and were almost always written by women. She gave me Alice Childress's "A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich," and "Maud Martha," by Gwendolyn Brooks, and "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," by Betty Smith. I felt just like the heroine, Francie, who dreams of being a writer and longs to see the world but can't imagine how she's ever going to get out of Brooklyn to do so.

My mother spent many hours alone with me, in the dark, in her bedroom, listening to me lie. Somehow, she knew that most writers became writers after having spent their childhood lying. Or perhaps she didn't know that at all. But she was extremely tolerant of my lies. And she was not impatient with my pretensions. When, at thirteen or fourteen, I began wearing a silk ascot to school, and took to writing by the light of a kerosene lamp like my then hero, Horace Greeley, the famous nineteenth-century journalist, she didn't say a word.

My mother loved "Crime and Punishment." She read it over and over again while locked in the bathroom. Her second-favorite novel was Paule Marshall's "Brown Girl, Brownstones," the story, in part, of a Brooklyn girl named Selina who is of Bajan descent. My mother passed this book on to me, and I read it eleven times. I was eleven years old. I read the author's biography on the book flap, and looked her name up in the Manhattan telephone directory. When Paule Marshall answered the telephone, I told her, in a rush, how much my mother loved her novel, and that we did not live very far from where Selina had grown up. Paule Marshall was surprised and pleased; she made her son pick up the extension and listen in. Later, when I told my mother what I had done, she looked at me in amazement. She knew that I had telephoned Paule Marshall for both of us.

My brother and I didn't like Barbados. In the summers, we were sent there, with packages of clothes and food as gifts, but we preferred to imagine the island through my mother's memories of it. In 1979, when I was seventeen, I read a story by a writer from the West Indies. In the story, "Wingless," by Jamaica Kincaid, I read this description of the Caribbean Sea and its surroundings: "The sea, the shimmering pink-colored sand, the swimmers with hats, two people walking arm in arm, talking in each other's faces, dots of water landing on noses, the sea spray on ankles, on overdeveloped calves, the blue, the green, the black, so deep, so smooth, a great and swift undercurrent, glassy, the white wavelets." This story changed everything for me. After reading it, I read it aloud to my mother, and when I finished she said, "Exactly."

As a pubescent Negress, I spent a great deal of time in thrall to the sister who was eleven years older than I was; she continued to live at home for years after our other sisters had left. She was the only college student I knew. She created a world in her bedroom that resonated with style and intellectual possibility. She was beautiful: she had long legs and a long neck and shoulder-length black hair that she wore in a chignon. She wore straight skirts and cardigans and flats. She had many lovers, which later prompted one of our other sisters to say, "She's so nasty. Like a dog." In her room, we danced to Dionne Warwick singing "Don't Make Me Over," as my sister began getting dressed for the evening. When she asked for my advice on what to wear, I knew she was pleased with me. Sometimes, in a sudden fit of pique, she would demand to know what I was anyway, hanging around a girl's bedroom.

As I grew up, it became increasingly clear that one of the reasons for my sister's occasional sharp annoyance with me was this: she wanted to be able to see herself in contrast to me. All the women in my family wanted me to become a

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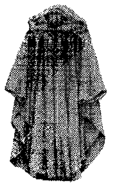

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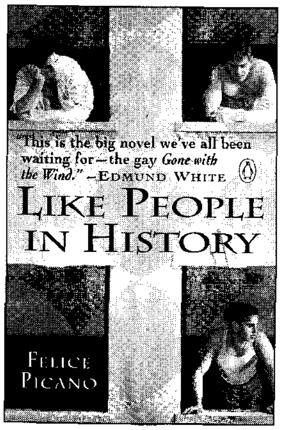
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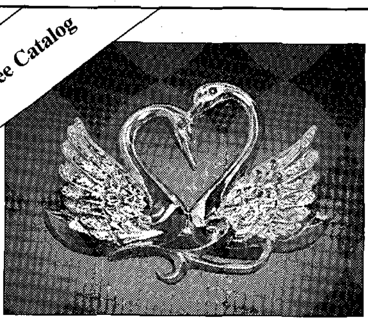

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PUZZLES

black male for the same reason: they wanted to define themselves against me. I tried to please them, because I adored them. I thought that being an auntie man was a fair compromise, but it wasn't.

When I was thirteen, I went to a party given by one of my mother's relatives. I didn't know why my mother did not attend the party until I returned home and told her about it. We were standing in the kitchen, and I told her how I had met a man there who had asked after her. I described him: bald head, a square figure, deep-dark skin. I met him on the stoop of the house where the party was. I remembered everything about the meeting, and spoke of it excitedly. I didn't tell my mother about the man's charm, and my attraction to his charm. Nor did I describe the orange sun setting behind his large brown head; rubbing my moist hands against the stoop's bumpy concrete; admiring his graceful saunter as he walked away. My mother's face became hard when I mentioned his first name, Eldred. She would not look at me when she said, "That was the man I was married to. That was my husband." The air was still between us; it became a wall. I knew I was a Negress because of the jealousy I felt at her having rejected someone I wanted. I glanced at my mother; her face, her body, told me that she had been where I wanted to be long before I began imagining it. We stood in the kitchen for quite some time. I saw myself in my mother's eyes: a teen-age girl, insecure, jealous, and vengeful.

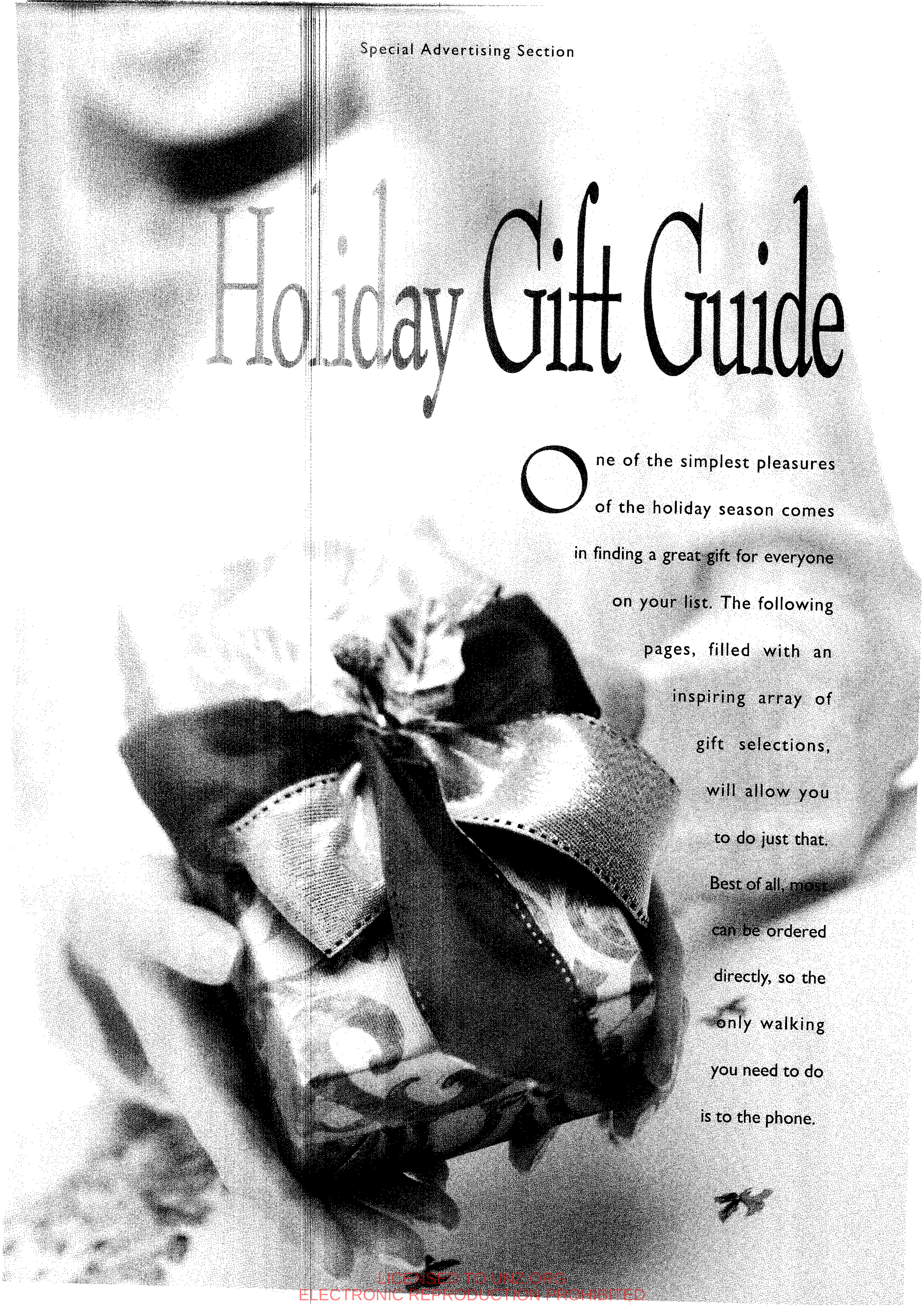
Like my sister, I grew up to lie with first one man and then another, or, more accurately, to bend over one man and then another in parked cars that lined the piers on the West Side Highway. Until the end, I avoided recounting these facts to my mother. I avoided explaining the impetus that propelled me to leave her home in Brooklyn for the piers on the West Side Highway. I avoided explaining that I had been motivated by the same desire and romantic greed that had propelled her to move from Barbados to New York. I avoided explaining that when I sat in parked cars with one man and then another, I felt closer to her experience of the world than I ever did in her actual presence. I avoided mentioning that the men I seduced were almost always white, and that, with my mouth tentatively poised over another man's mouth, I sometimes thought, I am not my mother; this is *my* story. I sometimes fantasized, If she knew I was performing this act, this gesture, she would perhaps die, releasing me to live fully in the moment. I never told her how I met other Negresses like myself, the boy children of women who had emigrated to New York from islands like Jamaica, Cuba, Antigua, Anguilla, Barbados, Barbuda. And we never mentioned to one another how, when we left those cars and bars in our soiled bluejeans, and after the long subway ride home to Brooklyn or Queens or the Bronx, we were met at the kitchen door by our mirror image—Mom, a Negress, who rarely recounted anything at all about her life.

MY mother died in Barbados, our ancestral home. Before she left New York for the last time, I did not visit her; this was only one of many leave-takings, and we could not bear to say goodbye. Neither did she say goodbye to her sister, who was to return to Barbados later, after my mother's death. "I knew she wouldn't come back to New York. I knew she would die here," my aunt told me when I went there to see where my mother had died. My visit meant nothing to my aunt. She is unsentimental—a family trait. She said several things when I went to visit her in her ugly house surrounded by coconut trees on a pitiful plot of land. She said, "Your mother was so angry at the end." She asked, "When did you know you were going to be an auntie man?" She asked, "When will you write a story about me?" And I did not ask myself, "Am I not a Negress, too? Will I ever be capable of writing a story about any of us?" In that ugly house in Barbados as the trade winds blew, my aunt was telling me that I would. ♦

How the Suffolk County legislatorsure voted Tuesday night to regarding placinge on the November ballot a resolution to make ing English the county's official language of the county.—*Newsday.*

In favor?

Holiday Gift Guide



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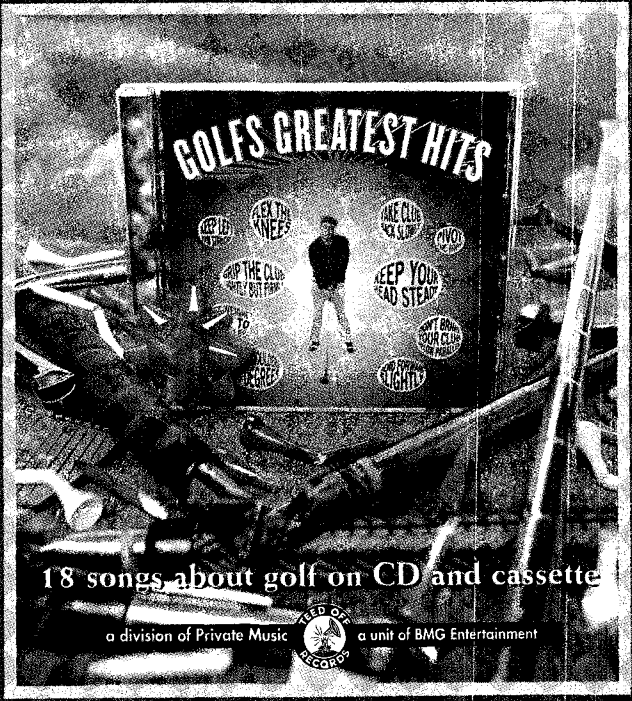
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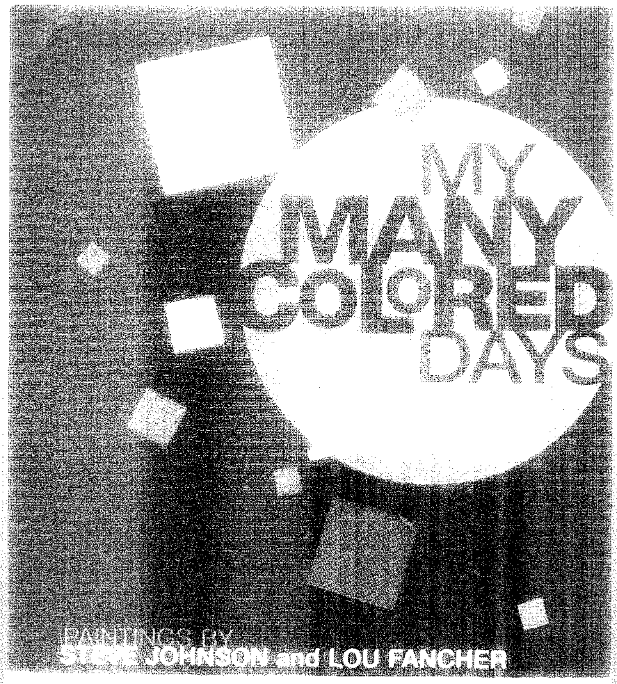

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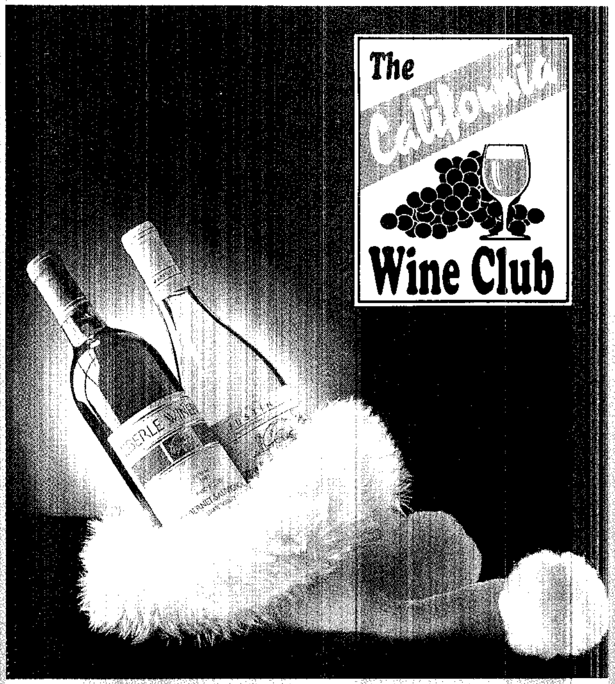
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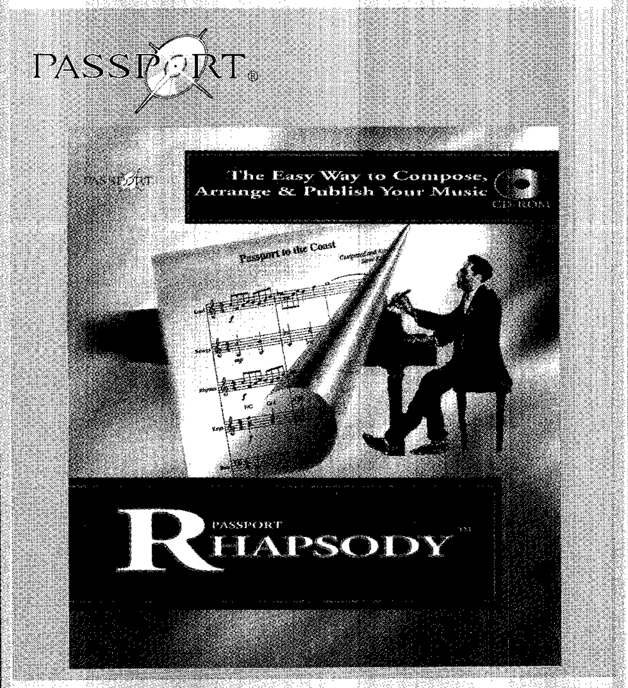
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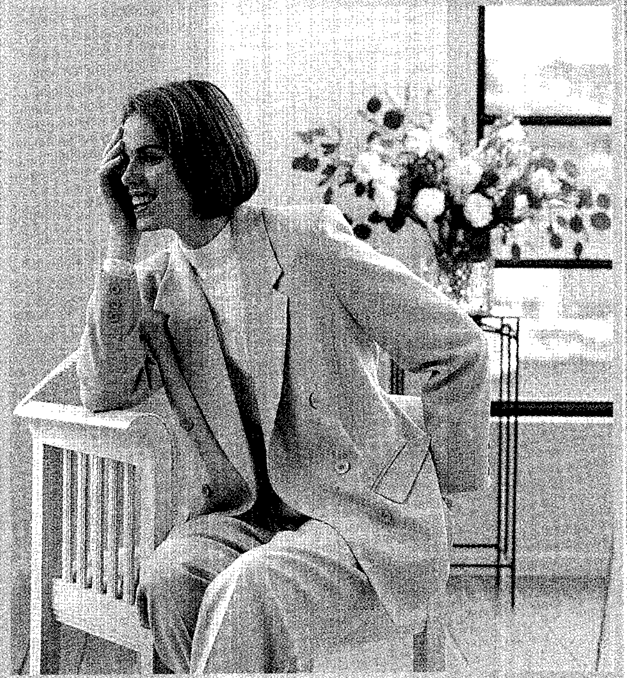

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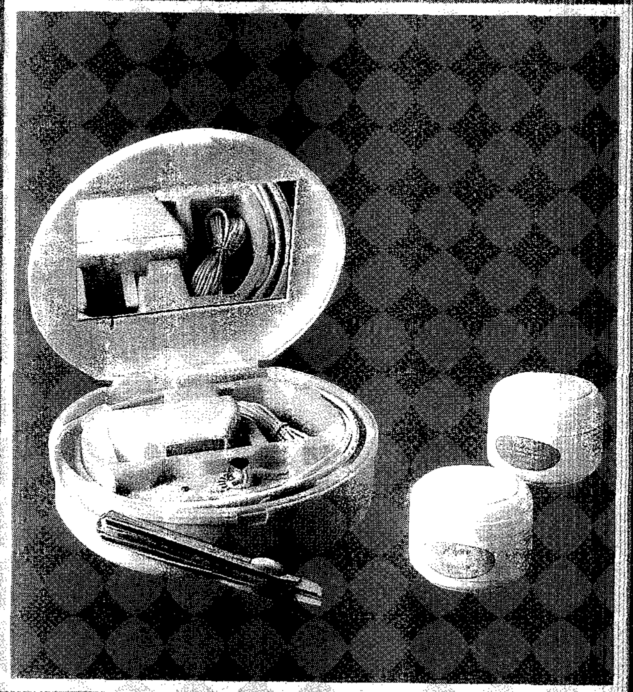

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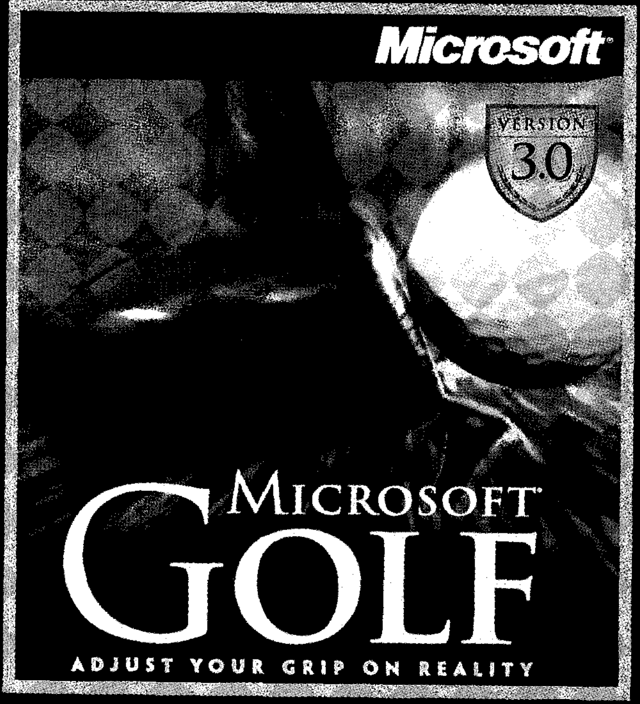

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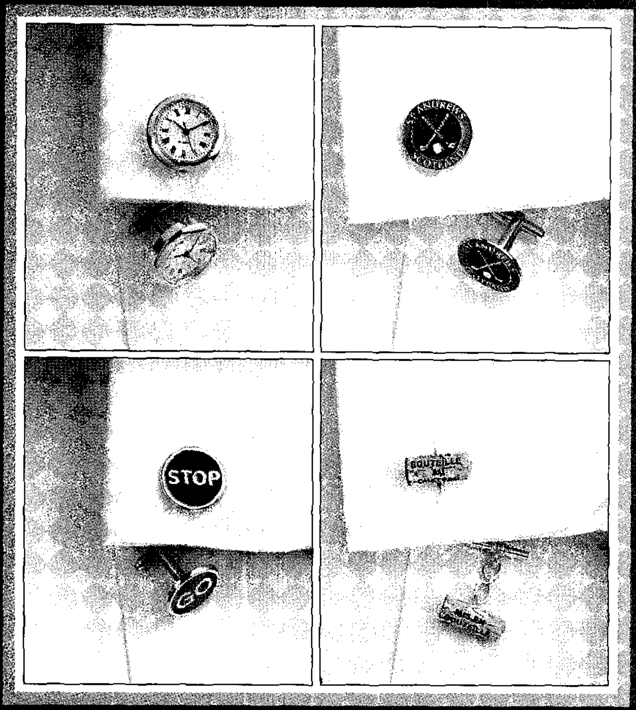

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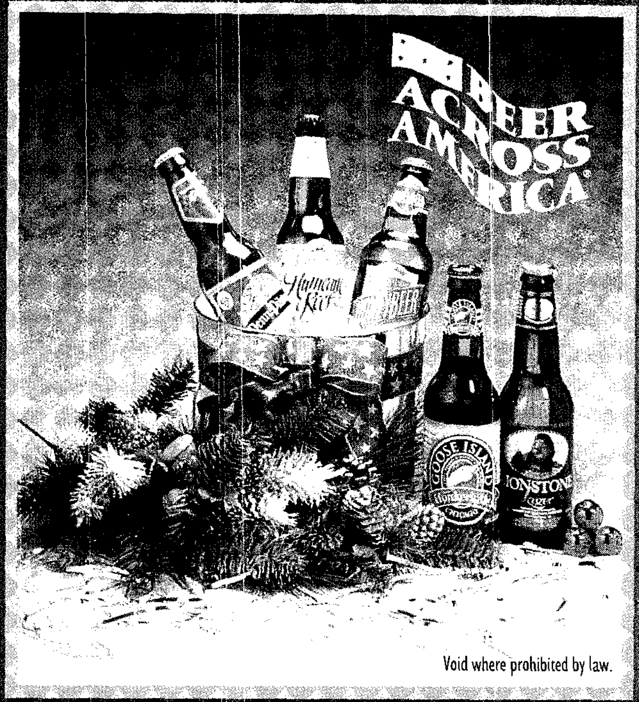

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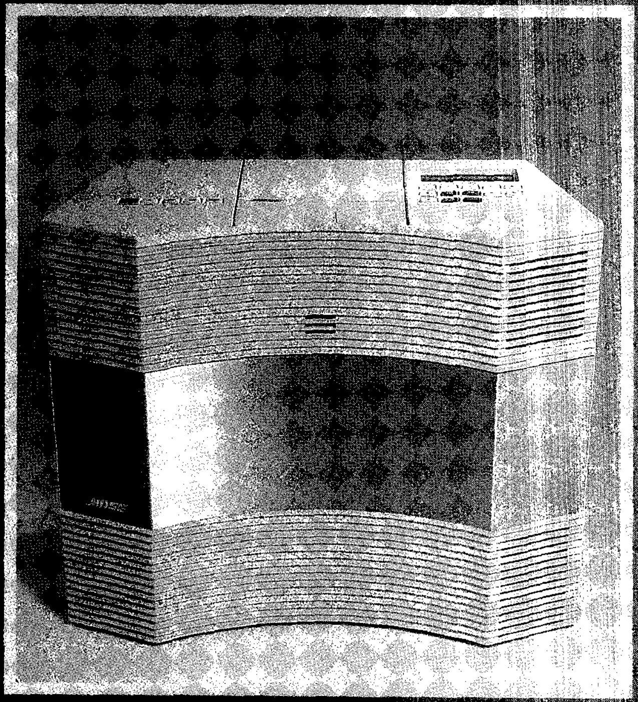

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

RECOVERING FROM APARTHEID

The deadline for applying for amnesty from South Africa's Truth Commission is approaching. But will the confessions of former state officials who once terrorized the nation satisfy the need for justice?

BY TINA ROSENBERG

JOE MORSE

DIRK JOHANNES COETZEE and his wife, Karin, live in a small house on the outskirts of Pretoria. From their back yard you can see across a field to the red sandstone Union Buildings, where President Nelson Mandela and his colleagues in the post-apartheid government have their offices. The neighborhood is placid and leafy and solidly middle-class, and the house is protected only by the Coetzee family dogs. There is wall-to-wall carpeting in the living room, white sofas with matching armchairs, and a glass-topped coffee table on which are perched several ceramic birds. Coetzee, a handsome, youthful-looking man of fifty-one with a shock of gray hair falling over his forehead, likes to pad about in sweatpants, a sweatshirt, and leather slippers. Visitors find him friendly and a little nervous, and he talks in a manic stream. His subject more often than not these days is his history as a ruthless killer.

Coetzee's soliloquy of guilt is part of a drama being played out in cities across South Africa and on television each night, as the truth commission inaugurated by Mandela's government holds public hearings and tries to force the country to come to terms with its past. Coetzee was the first white policeman to confess to crimes committed against blacks for political reasons. While the white government was still in power, he spoke from "in the heart of the whore," as he puts it, confirming stories that officials had denied for years.

Coetzee was born in 1945 to a small-town Afrikaner family in the northern Transvaal. His father was a postal clerk. He was a hot-tempered, athletic boy, good at rugby, swimming, and track, and uninterested in schoolwork. He had a job as a postal inspector for several years, and in 1970 joined the South African Police. Coetzee loved police work. He was first in his training class and served with distinction. In 1974, he was sent to South Africa's secret guerrilla war in Rhodesia. When he came back, he went into the security police, where he prospered, and in August, 1980, he was made commander of a counterinsurgency unit known as Vlakplaas.

Vlakplaas was a farm outside Pretoria that housed government informers who had turned against the African National Congress and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. They were called *askaris*, Swahili for "soldiers." The idea was that the *askaris* would go out and mix with the locals to finger their former comrades. But in fact they acted as a covert hit squad.

The white officers at Vlakplaas considered themselves the vanguard of the African outpost of Christian civilization. Events of the mid-seventies—the victory of rebel Communist forces over Portuguese colonials in Angola and Mozambique, and the student uprising in Soweto in 1976—increased their conviction that they alone stood in the way of Armageddon. "It was so pure, so select, so élite," Coetzee says. "It was an honor to serve."

Early in November, 1981, one of Coetzee's superiors called him into his office and told him to "make a plan" with Griffiths Mxenge, a prominent A.N.C. lawyer. The officer told Coetzee that Mxenge was supporting terrorists, and Coetzee asked several of his soldiers to stake out Mxenge's home, office, and car.

On November 19th, Griffiths Mxenge left his office in the coastal resort city of Durban early in the evening. He got into a white Audi and headed toward his home in Umlazi, Durban's vast black township. As he neared his house, he saw a gray van parked in the road with its hood open. A man waved him down, and, when Mxenge stopped, the man asked him for a jump start. Mxenge got out of his car, and two more men appeared, carrying pistols. They forced him into the back of the Audi and drove to the Umlazi cycling stadium, where they stabbed him forty-five times and slit his throat. They took his jacket, his watch, and his wallet and drove off in the Audi. The car's stereo system was later installed in a Mercedes that belonged to one of Coetzee's superiors. Coetzee and his soldiers poured gasoline on the Audi and set it on fire. "He was a negative black, not a 'ja baas' black. That made him a Communist, a terrorist, the Antichrist," Coetzee says. "It's hard to explain now."

The official investigation, such as it was, ended with the blame going to an "unknown person or persons." The chief of the Security Branch announced that the police were looking into the theory that members of the A.N.C. killed Mxenge in a dispute over his handling of funds. The same finding and similar theories were announced in the murders of perhaps a hundred other activists, including the 1985 shooting death of Mxenge's wife, Victoria, who had taken over his defense work.

The assassination of Griffiths Mxenge would have remained a successful police operation against the A.N.C., followed by an effective coverup, had not something unexpected happened: in 1989, Dirk Coetzee went into exile and confessed to the murder and to other crimes he had committed along with his Vlakplaas comrades.

COETZEE returned to South Africa in 1993, during the transition to black rule, but it is as unlikely that he will go to jail for Mxenge's murder now as it was during the height of apartheid. Early this year, he went to the Cape Town headquarters of the new Truth and Reconciliation Commission and handed in an application for amnesty for a long list of crimes, including six murders. Under the law that created the commission, anyone who makes a full disclosure of a politically motivated crime committed between March 1, 1960 (the month of the Sharpeville police massacre and the year that the A.N.C. was banned), and December 5, 1993, the day before South Africa's accords for transition to majority rule were approved—will probably receive indemnity from civil and criminal prosecution. Coetzee was indicted in July for the Mxenge murder, and a trial date was set for early December. But even if he is convicted he may not have to serve a prison sentence. The Truth Commission began hearing his testimony last week, and he is likely to be granted amnesty.

The Truth Commission hopes to encourage political criminals on all sides to confess in detail to their acts. It offers Dirk Coetzee and other perpetrators of human-rights abuses a kind of giant national plea bargain. If they confess and name names, they may be granted amnesty and can avoid a trial. Not all these confessions will result in amnesty. People whose crimes are deemed "disproportionately" heinous or not politically motivated can be turned down and will remain liable to prosecution or to civil suits. Coetzee's crimes might well put him in that category, but the commission is likely to be lenient, taking into account the fact that he told his story at a time when it undermined the apartheid government and helped lead to its downfall, and that it led to other confessions.

Coetzee's break with apartheid was not, however, due to a sudden attack of conscience. Like many Vlakplaas officers, he stole and smuggled for personal gain. He was caught protecting smuggler friends from police investigations. Even by Vlakplaas standards he was a loose cannon, and was frequently insubordinate. His behavior drew reprimands, and with each demotion he became more isolated and resentful. He began to tell Vlakplaas stories at parties. In 1982, he was relegated to the narcotics bureau and two years later was brought before an official police board on seven charges of misconduct. Finally, in 1986, he decided that it was time to quit. He exaggerated his diabetes and got a medical retirement.

Coetzee had been meeting occasionally for off-the-record talks with Jacques Pauw, a young reporter from a new independent Afrikaans weekly, the *Vrye Weekblad.* At dinner in September, 1989, Pauw asked him under what circumstances he would talk for the record. "Find me a safe place where my family and I can live in peace," Coetzee replied. Pauw realized that this could be done only through the A.N.C., and, without asking Coetzee, began to explore the idea.

A month later, one of Coetzee's black hit men, Almond Nofemela, talked. He was on death row for killing a white man in a nonpolitical crime. Just before he was scheduled to be hanged, a visiting member of Vlakplaas told him that the organization was reneging on its promise to save him. "Take the pain," he said. Instead, Nofemela told a lawyer from a human-rights group that he had been a member of the team that stabbed Griffiths Mxenge. The confession bought him a stay of execution. (Now that the death penalty has been abolished, he is serving a life sentence.)

The police called in everyone Nofemela had named except Coetzee, who realized that he was being set up to take the blame. On November 5, 1989, he and Pauw left for the island of Mauritius, where Pauw interviewed him, and on November 9th Coetzee flew to London. *Vrye Weekblad* published Coetzee's story a week later, just as the new President, F. W. DeKlerk, was pledging reform. An investigating commission was appointed. The police denied that Vlakplaas was a hub of illegal activity, making the rather unusual argument that the two confessed murderers were in fact innocent. The commission concluded that Coetzee had lied, and that Vlakplaas had no death squads.

In London, a wary Dirk Coetzee met with an even warier Jacob Zuma, the intelligence chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe. At the end of the debriefing, Zuma and his men offered Coetzee the A.N.C.'s protection. After spending a decade slaughtering the blacks he believed were threatening his home, family, women, children, *volk*, and nation, and Western Christianity itself, Dirk Coetzee applied for and received membership in the African National Congress. "Instead of the brutal savages about whom we were taught by the South African regime," he wrote in an unpublished memoir, "I found highly intelligent, extremely well-informed, and civilized gentlemen for whom I soon felt nothing but admiration and respect."

The feeling was not quite mutual. The A.N.C. never fully trusted Coetzee, but it understood how crucial his revelations were to the anti-apartheid cause. He was a white policeman from a counterinsurgency unit, and he was corroborating the A.N.C.'s claims that the government had sponsored systematic abuses of human rights, including murder and torture. Comrade Dirk was taken care of in exile for years in London and then in Lusaka, Zambia. This rapidly advanced him to the top of the South African security forces' enemies list.

In Lusaka, Coetzee was sent a package containing a booby-trapped personal stereo. The wrapping had the name and return address of the A.N.C. lawyer Bheki Mlangeni, who had become a friend of his. When Coetzee refused to pay what he considered outrageous import duties, the package was "returned" to Mlangeni, who put on the headphones and popped in a tape labelled "Evidence of Hit Squads." Then his head blew off.

THE head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is Desmond Tutu, the Nobel Prize winning defender of the downtrodden, who was the secretary-general of the South African Council of Churches when Griffiths Mxenge was murdered in 1981, and who, as it happens, gave the principal eulogy at his funeral, in a tiny village outside King William's Town, in the Eastern Cape. "When the government of the people takes over, justice will be done," he promised a crowd of fifteen thousand mourners in an emotional sermon. The government of the people took over in 1994, but whether or not justice is being done is a point of contention.

"He has turned his back to us," Churchill Mxenge says of Tutu. Churchill Mxenge is a compact, balding, middle-aged man with glasses and a serious demeanor. He is Griffiths Mxenge's younger brother, and he now works as the chief of the title-registry office in the Eastern Cape provincial capital of Bisho, a dusty town whose center consists of one street with a half-dozen government buildings, a parking lot, a fish-and-chips takeout, and a few shops surrounded by miles of dirt fields. "I try to put myself in Tutu's position," Churchill Mxenge says. "Tutu is a man of the cloth, a man who believes in miracles. But I cannot see him being able overnight to cause people who are hurt and bleeding simply to forget about their wounds and forget about justice. It is President Mandela's wish, too. But that is not normal. That doesn't happen. Unless justice is done it's difficult for any person to think of forgiving."

In April, the Mxenge family, along with the

"These are some of my new friends from birthing class."

families of Steve Biko and of the murdered activists Fabian and Florence Ribeiro, joined with the radical Azanian People's Organization to file a lawsuit contending that the Truth Commission had violated the right of families to seek judicial redress for the murders of their loved ones. In August, the court ruled in favor of the Truth Commission.

The idea of peaceful reconciliation is one that has informed Tutu's career, and it is no surprise that he is defending it so vigorously now. In 1976, the year after he was appointed Anglican Dean of Johannesburg, he wrote an open letter to then Prime Minister John Vorster in which he spoke of the need for "real reconciliation with justice for all." When he met Coetzee in London, he told him that the South African people forgave him because he had expressed his sorrow. He put himself on the line as a peacemaker at Griffiths Mxenge's funeral. As at almost every A.N.C. funeral, several undercover policemen were secretly recording the event, among them a constable named Albert Tofile. When funeral-goers discovered that Tofile's partner had a tape recorder, Tofile pulled a gun. The crowd turned into a mob and attacked him. He fell. The mob kicked and stoned him. Desmond Tutu leaped from the platform and threw himself over the policeman's body. He calmed the crowd and returned to the podium, his clerical robes drenched with blood.

Churchill Mxenge is right about Tutu's belief in miracles; when Tutu calls the current situation "the miracle that is South Africa," he means it literally, as the fruit of divine intervention. He insists that he is not a politician, and points out that he never joined the A.N.C. But the drive for emotional connection that suits him so well as a pastor has made him immensely effective in the public arena. "He is deeply spiritual and a total media freak," Alex Boraine, the vice chairman of the commission, says. Tutu is probably the second most beloved South African—after the President, who has a very different style. Mandela is referred to as the Old Man, not just for his age, seventy-eight, but for his sombre, cautious nature. Tutu, who is sixty-five and just became Archbishop Emeritus, likes to make rabbit ears behind people's heads in photographs. He is known as the Arch, and has a trademark habit of throwing his head back and his arms in the air—"doing the Arch"—when he is delighted, which is frequently. Like Bill Clinton, he thrives on having seven people tugging at him at once, and then persuading each one that he has his complete attention and interest.

CAESAR'S
Salon

"You wave at clowns, Peg. You don't marry them and let them run your life."

Whether or not Tutu's gospel of reconciliation will triumph over the "normal" human impulses to seek vengeance and punishment is an open question. The story of Constable Albert Tofile at Griffiths Mxenge's funeral did not end with Tutu's heroics; a few minutes later, the crowd dragged Tofile from his car and killed him.

THE Truth Commission runs parallel to the court system. Although the two institutions are separate, each can benefit from information gathered by the other, and their missions intertwine. A person who has committed a serious political crime has a choice: he can apply for amnesty by testifying to his own and his colleagues' transgressions at a public hearing in front of television cameras, or he can sweat it out and hope that others applying for amnesty do not provide evidence implicating him, and thus make him liable for indictment. If he does not apply for amnesty by the cutoff date of December 14th (the Truth Commission has asked parliament to extend it for three months), he has lost the opportunity to avoid punishment for crimes that may come to light during testimony from those who have applied.

A few weeks ago, one of Coetzee's successors at Vlakplaas, Colonel Eugene de Kock, known as Prime Evil, was sentenced by a court to two life terms and more than two hundred years in prison for various crimes, including sending the stereo bomb that killed Bheki Mlangeni. Dozens of de Kock's men testified against him, excusing their own actions on the ground that they were following orders, and in the process implicating many of their former superiors. Several of the soldiers are applying for amnesty. De Kock has said that he will apply, too, although many of his crimes had little or nothing to do with politics, and others were heinous in the extreme.

In March of this year, Desmond Tutu appeared on a television program with several members of the families of apartheid-era victims. Churchill Mxenge repeated what Tutu had said at his brother's funeral, and accused him of betraying his promise of justice. The perpetrators "are still in the security

"I sold my soul for about a tenth of what the damn things are going for now."

• •

forces and part of the civil service," Tutu replied. "Those people have the capacity of destroying this land. . . . If there were not the possibility of amnesty, then the option of a military upheaval is a very real one."

Tutu's answer reflects the practical justification for the Truth Commission: protecting the new democracy by appeasing powerful and well-armed whites. But there is also a philosophical answer. I had dinner recently at a restaurant in the industrial city of Port Elizabeth with Tutu, his bodyguard, and Alex Boraine, and I asked Tutu about what he had said in his eulogy for Griffiths Mxenge in 1981. Did he think that he was honoring his promise of justice?

"There are different kinds of justice," he said. "Retributive justice is largely Western. The African understanding is far more restorative—not so much to punish as to redress or restore a balance that has been knocked askew. The justice we hope for is restorative of the dignity of the people." This is an expression of the African notion of *ubuntu*—interconnectedness, the idea that no one can be healthy when the community is sick. "It's a deeply Christian concept," Tutu said. "You are not saved as an individual, but through incorporation into a body. *Ubuntu* really is a good deal more Biblical and Christian than Western individualism is."

Tutu's notion of a restored community encompasses even Eugene de Kock. "We can say he is a monster," Tutu told reporters recently. "But he is a human being with a possibility of changing."

THE Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up on July 19, 1995, as part of the National Unity and Reconciliation Act, a bitterly debated law that ran to forty-eight single-spaced pages and was nicknamed "the mother of all bills." The commission is made up of three committees, the most controversial of which is the Amnesty Committee. So far, it has received more than three thousand applications, mostly from people already in jail.

Establishing the principle of amnesty for apartheid-era crimes was a key issue in the negotiations on South Africa's transition to black rule in the early nineteen-nineties. The old government first insisted on a blanket amnesty. "That nearly derailed the whole process," says Dullah Omar, who became Mandela's Minister of Justice. But the A.N.C. took seriously threats of a violent halt to the transition. What was called a "postamble" to the 1993 interim constitution stipulated that there would be some kind of amnesty—details to follow. "My first year in office, I spent three-quarters of my time grappling with this," Omar says.

Most countries replacing right-wing dictatorships with democracies have instituted amnesties, either formally or informally. Upon leaving power, Latin-American dictators tended to issue themselves amnesties—a corruption of the historic concept of amnesty, which is granted by a government to people who took up arms against it. If there was no official amnesty, the generals simply sabotaged the judicial process or warned their civilian successors that trials would bring a military revolt.

As a consolation prize in countries where the new government did not have the power to hold widespread trials, the Latin-Americans came up with the idea of truth commissions. In Argentina and Chile, testimony about human-rights abuses helped get at what the Chilean human-rights lawyer José Zalaquett calls "all the truth, and as much justice as possible." The commissions released lengthy final reports that exploded the security forces' propaganda, provoked great public debate, and gave official government acknowledgment of state crimes. "Truth doesn't bring the dead back to life," Zalaquett likes to say. "But it brings them out from silence." Since the Latin-American commissions had no subpoena power, however, and offered perpetrators no incentive to talk, they relied for information primarily on the testimony of victims, which was taken not in public but behind closed doors. Without the perpetrators' testimony, most families never found out "all the truth." In Chile, where not a single soldier has come forward voluntarily to talk about the disappearances, families are still waiting, after twenty-three years, to find out what happened to their loved ones.

South Africa was in a very different

situation. A year after Mandela became President, the old apartheid barons were much more discredited and isolated than anyone had expected. Mandela's government was so popular that it could probably have decided to reverse the constitutional provision of amnesty entirely. It did not, because its leaders genuinely believed in reconciliation.

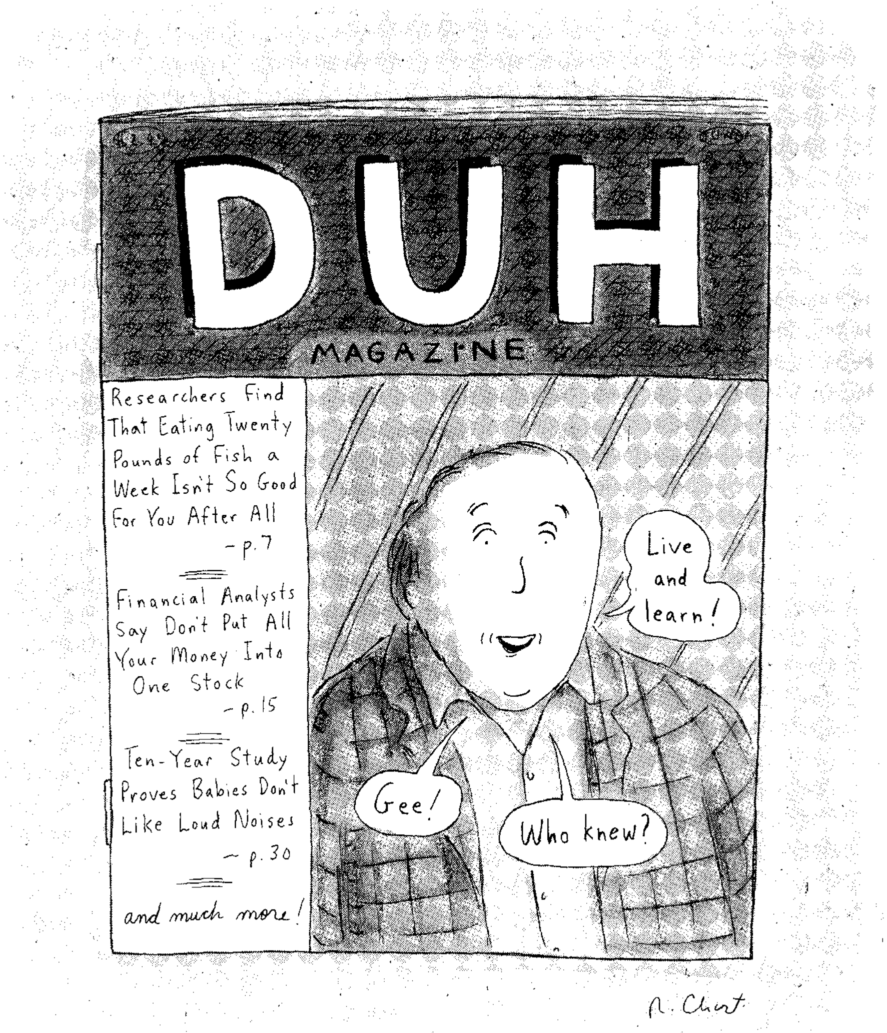
The two other committees that make up the commission concentrate on the victims of political crimes. The Human Rights Violations Committee relies on a team of sixty investigators armed with the power to subpoena witnesses and seize documents. All South Africans who were victims of political violence are welcome to go to a commission office and talk to a staff member about their suffering. If a story seems accurate, the victim is invited to testify, if he or she wishes, at one of the televised public hearings that are being held in township halls and churches all over South Africa. Another committee, Reparation and Rehabilitation, screens victims to see if they need urgent assistance, such as medical or psychological treatment, money to educate children, or help getting pensions and other entitlements. The Reparation Committee can also recommend some sort of recognition of hardship, say a scholarship or a health clinic named for a victim.

The Human Rights Violations Committee opened its hearings on April 15th, in East London, a small city in the Eastern Cape. About four hundred people were in the audience to hear a religious service and Tutu's prayer for healing and repentance for both victims and perpetrators. Then everyone sang the new national anthem. A candle burned onstage. The first witness was Nohle Mohapi, who testified about her activist husband's death in police custody in 1976, which was reported as a suicide, and her own six months in solitary confinement for her work as Steve Biko's secretary. The witnesses sat at a table with a friend or relative on their left and on their right a Truth Commission briefer, who comforted them and provided tissues and an arm when the crying started. Twice in the first two days, Tutu himself collapsed in tears.

A similar scene has been repeated practically every weekday since, with nine or ten witnesses a day. Each week, the hearings move to a different township hall, church, or auditorium around the country; sometimes there are hearings in two different cities simultaneously. A troop of newspaper and TV reporters travels with the hearings, and most major newspapers, even Afrikaans papers, give them extensive coverage, often with a separate story about each witness's testimony.

The audiences are virtually all black, with old women in hand-sewn dresses and turbans, and young people in torn tennis shoes and knit caps. They also seem almost uniformly pro-A.N.C. Conservative whites and conservative black supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party, a Zulu nationalist party formerly funded and supported by the apartheid government, told me that they think of the commission as an A.N.C. operation and are terrified that it will inspire A.N.C. supporters to violence. "It's just opening old wounds," a local Inkatha politician in Umlazi said. "It makes you hate the person you had forgiven." Ironically, he echoed the words of Churchill Mxenge, who said, "I personally feel they are making themselves the joke of the country, crying in front of the cameras, and at the end of the day, nothing."

The membership of the commission contradicts the view that it is an organ of the A.N.C. The seventeen commissioners come from a broad spectrum of groups. They are mostly lawyers, clergy, psychologists, or human-rights activists, and range from a member of the Pan-Africanist Congress on the left to a member of the Freedom Front, a group calling for an Afrikaner homeland. There are seven blacks, two coloreds, two Indians, and six whites. Many witnesses have come to testify about killings or bombings committed by the A.N.C., and the commission has treated them with equal respect. When Mandela visited a Johannesburg hearing


DUH
MAGAZINE
Researchers Find That Eating Twenty Pounds of Fish a Week Isn't So Good For You After All - p. 7
Financial Analysts Say Don't Put All Your Money Into One Stock - p. 15
Ten-Year Study Proves Babies Don't Like Loud Noises - p. 30
and much more!
Live and learn!
Gee!
Who knew?
R. Chast

and sat in the gallery, Tutu put on a witness who testified about abuses he had suffered in an A.N.C. training camp.

The public, however, has not been as respectful. At a hearing in Bloemfontein, in July, when a witness asked for compensation for the death of his son in an A.N.C. camp, members of the audience began to hiss and shout. Tutu had to ask them for tolerance toward people "with whom you don't identify." More recently, Tutu clashed openly with A.N.C. officials who don't think that their members need to seek amnesty, since whatever they did under apartheid was justified as part of the struggle for freedom. Last week, he threatened to resign from the commission unless the A.N.C. formally acknowledged that it, too, was responsible for human-rights abuses.

But perhaps the commission's most important contribution is that forgotten victims, in forgotten towns, will have their cases investigated and the chance to tell their stories. For example, the first time the country took notice of repression in Worcester, a city of sixty thousand in the Western Cape's wine country, was a winter day last June, when a few hundred people, mostly middle-aged women, filled the rows of plastic chairs in the auditorium of a teachers' college. In the course of two days, nineteen people—blacks testifying in Xhosa and coloreds in Afrikaans—told of killings and torture. Amos Dyantyi, a middle-aged civic leader from Worcester's black township, described being given electrical shocks through wires in his anus and attached to his neck. Then, he went on, "they took an instrument like a jackhammer, with sharp iron points, and used it there." He stopped and reached for a glass of water. "I am sorry, I apologize for my expression of emotion," he said. By that time, most of the audience was in tears.

"It has taken it off of my heart," Mzukisi Mdidimba told me after testifying about being tortured at the age of sixteen. "When I have told stories of my life before, afterward I am crying, crying, crying, and felt it was not finished. This time, I know what they've done to me will be among these people and all over the country. I still have some sort of crying, but also joy inside." Outside the Worcester hearing, Virginia Nuzuko told me that she, like most people there, knew every witness. "We come to hear the history of our people," she said. "White people in that time did not see us as persons. We know now we are persons."

WHAT Latin-American victims wanted—justice in a court of law, with real prison cells for murderers and torturers—was rejected by almost every A.N.C. official I spoke with as smacking of "Nuremberg," "vengeance," and "retribution." Virtually all the victims of abuse who have come before the Truth Commission have not asked for prosecution. Ncediwe Mfeti, testifying about the disappearance of her husband, Phindile, in East London, said on the second day of hearings, "All I want is the security policemen to give me back the photograph they took away twenty years ago. And if there is a part of his body, even a bone somewhere, to give it back to me so I can give him an honorable burial."

Forgoing retribution, however, seems to be easier for policymakers or for those who have gone through the intense experience of testifying before Tutu's commission than it is for most ordinary black South Africans. The politicians, intellectuals, and private-school or foreign-educated blacks now naming their salaries in the corporate world have ample reason to defend the miracle of their new state. The average citizen, on the other hand, for whom little has changed, is not necessarily willing to placate whites at any cost. Recently, I went with a Zulu-speaking interpreter to Durban's township of Umlazi, a hilly jumble of matchbox shacks with chickens pecking in the dirt yards and a few middle-class homes with the occasional B.M.W. parked in front. Umlazi is where Griffiths Mxenge lived. His house, shown to me by its new residents, was nicer than most—with a sloping roof instead of the usual flat one, several rooms, and a covered garage—but it was no mansion. It had a hot plate for a stove, and there was no refrigerator. The neighbors were enthusiastic about the Truth Commission (the area is an A.N.C. stronghold) and followed it on TV. But when I asked if they agreed with the idea of trading justice for truth they all said the same thing: "Let's have both." Nonhlanala Dlamini, a young woman wearing thick glasses, who was helping her mother wash clothes in a bucket next door to the Mxenge house, said, "I'd tell the commission to investigate and hang the killer." The neighbors all wanted to restore the death penalty.

The politically savvy, however, know something that the people of Umlazi do not: that in the judicial system only a few victims would find true justice. "The reality is that the vast majority of the South African people don't have access to justice," Brandon Hamber, a researcher at the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, says.

South Africa's justice system, a marvel of efficiency and fairness by African standards, has been stretched to the breaking point by a crime wave that, as in other countries, has accompanied the transition to democracy. Prosecutors staged a work slowdown recently to protest their low pay. Police protection for witnesses is inadequate. In numerous apartheid-era cases, "everybody knows" what happened, but conclusive evidence is lacking. Few crimes left a paper trail. "We always planned our op-

A DIFFERENT KEY

The inspirational-misfit movie of the year is "Shine," an Australian film based on the life of David Helfgott (right), whose career as a concert pianist was shattered by a mental breakdown. The film, which caused a sensation at this year's Sundance Festival, opens in New York and Los Angeles on November 22nd, and has already propelled the forty-nine-year-old virtuoso back to the brink of international prominence. An American recital tour is planned for 1997, which means that audiences will have to prepare themselves for a performer who gets up from the keyboard from time to time to give listeners a hug. Helfgott, who has developed his own eccentric way with language, had just one word to say about the film's only slightly fictionalized dramatization of his life: "Brilliantissimo!"

Photograph by Tim Bauer

HEADPRESS COURTESY OF WHO WEEKLY AUSTRALIA

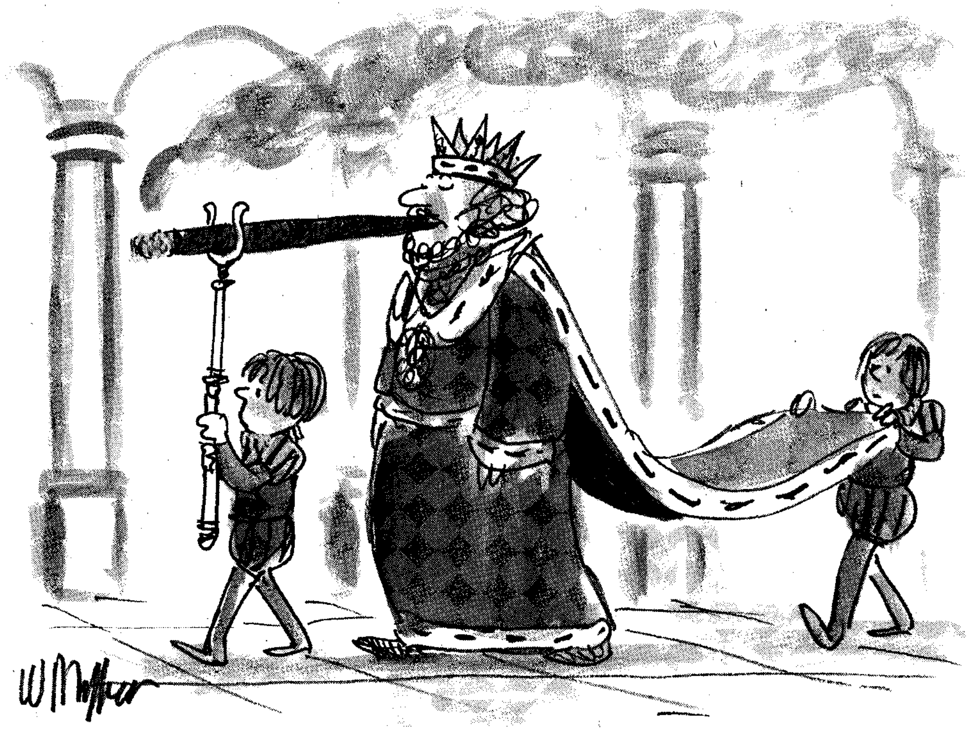
erations to leave no tracks," Dirk Coetzee says. The Army deliberately destroyed documents that could connect officers with crimes. Without documents, proving the involvement of higher-ups must depend on the testimony of underlings whose careers as murderers make them easy to discredit in court. In addition, the police routinely drop investigations and lose evidence to protect their colleagues.

I asked Dullah Omar why the police hadn't been purged. "When I was named Justice Minister I didn't know where the Ministry was—I had to look in the phone book," he said. "We knew nothing about what was going on. A large part of the first year was getting to know who's who. Then we had to keep things going. There has been an upswing in crime, and we didn't have the luxury of sweeping people out. Slowly, the police will be purged, in a way that involves the communities." At the moment, about a thousand policemen are under investigation for corruption.

The difficulty of prosecuting apartheid-era crimes was made painfully obvious early last month when Magnus Malan, who was South Africa's Defense Minister from 1980 to 1991, was acquitted—along with fifteen other defendants—of massacring thirteen people. Malan was alleged to have authorized a program that trained Inkatha fighters to form an anti-A.N.C. death squad—a "third force" behind the "black-on-black" violence that has killed fifteen thousand since 1984 in KwaZulu-Natal and is still going on. The third force was a brilliant stroke on the part of apartheid officials, since it allowed them to get blacks to do the dirty work against the A.N.C., and at the same time to shrug their shoulders and tell the world that blacks were simply ungovernable. According to the indictment, the massacre was ordered because the newly trained killers were bored; the victims, seven of whom were children, were not the intended targets. It was strong stuff, but not strong enough to reach Malan. In the end, the judge said there was no doubt that the soldiers were trained at a government base, but he felt that the state had not succeeded in directly linking Malan and the other defendants to the crime.

Although the acquittal of Malan was a blow to the Truth Commission, there have been convictions in other trials, like that of Eugene de Kock, and more trials are in the works. In late June, twenty-two policemen sent a letter to the commission admitting responsibility for twenty infamous unsolved cases. In late October, former Police Commissioner Johan van der Merwe laid the responsibility for the bombing of the headquarters of the South African Council of Churches in 1988 (for which A.N.C. soldiers had been blamed) on former President P. W. Botha himself. More Vlakplaas officers have sought amnesty, and a few A.N.C. officials are also coming forward: the current Defense Minister, Joe Modise, has announced that he will apply for amnesty. After van der Merwe testified, Alex Boraine said, "This is the start of the river that will become a flood."

No matter how many apartheid-era criminals turn to the commission for amnesty, its most ambitious mission is to change the way white South Africans think. And this may be more difficult than Desmond Tutu would like to believe. A day I spent talking to whites at Fourways, a suburban Johannesburg shopping mall, revealed the problem. Two people I polled had never heard of the Truth Commission. Two others expressed enthusiastic support, and said that the hearings were showing them shocking new aspects of the old regime. On the other hand, "General Malan wouldn't give orders to kill someone unless he had a good reason," said Mrs. Cecile Smith, of Sandton, a housewife shopping with her two daughters. "The Truth Commission puts whites in a bad light, and I feel I'm not to blame for what happened in the past." Ardy Van Huyssteen, from Johannesburg, a man in his thirties sitting with his baby daughter, said, "A lot of money is being wasted crying and screaming. It's not bringing back lives. I was a victim, too—I had to go into the Army against my will. I'm not standing there crying. The black man feels we owe him something just because his skin is black." John Dawson, of Johannesburg, a man in his fifties sitting with his wife, noted, "Apartheid is still here, only now it's reversed." And he also charged that the testimony is unreliable: "Black intelligence is not that good that they can remember things that happened six or seven years ago."



It seems clear that unless Truth Commission hearings are held at their kitchen tables during dinner, whites will find some way to shut the information out. Some South Africans I talked to felt that white racism is worse than ever. Whites feel threatened

READING MACHADO

The barren frangipani branches uncurl their sweet threat
out of the blue. More echoes than blossoms, they stun the senses
like the nocturnal magnolia, white as the pages I read,
with the prose printed on the left bank of the page
and, on the right, the shale-like speckle of stanzas
and the seam, like a stream stitching its own language.
The Spanish genius bristling like thistles. What provoked this?
The pods of a dry season, heat rippling in cadenzas,
black ruffles and the arc of a white throat?
These are all echoes, all associations and inferences,
the tone of Antonio Machado, even in translation,
the verb in the earth, the nouns in the stones, the walls,
all inference, all echo, all association,
the blue distance of Spain from bougainvillea verandahs
when white flowers sprout from the branches of a bull's horns,
the white frangipani's flowers like the white souls of nuns
that move like ponies under pine trees in the autumn mountains,
onions, and rope, the silvery bulbs of garlic, the creak
of saddles and fast water quarrelling over clear stones,
rooted and stunted as olive trees, these heat-cracked stanzas,
all inferences, all echoes, associations.

—DEREK WALCOTT

by the new crime wave, by South Africa's limited attempts at affirmative action, by the idea that their jobs and luxuries are no longer assured.

Dirk Coetzee, for one, is still bitter. Even before he was indicted, he had started to resent the A.N.C. When he returned to South Africa, he was given a job in the National Intelligence Agency, but he wanted to be a policeman again, and not some sort of spy. The government, he said, had ignored his suggestions for purging the police. He rented his house, his car was subsidized by the government, and he couldn't even afford to buy a new battery for the cell phone that he, like every other member of South Africa's élite, possesses. It was mid-morning when I visited him, and Coetzee seemed in no hurry to go to work.

Coetzee said that he had spent the years since Vlakplaas trying to make amends. "I have feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and humiliation—for all of it, but especially the murders." He has been going around to policemen, and urging them to apply for amnesty. And he has apologized. "My greatest fear was meeting a relative of a victim we killed," he said. When that finally happened, it was on the set of a British TV program on which Coetzee was appearing with Fumbatha Mxenge, one of Griffiths' brothers. Coetzee extended his hand, and Mxenge shook it. "Which I'm grateful for," Coetzee said. (Churchill Mxenge told me, "We can't accept his apologies, and he knows it.")

Coetzee's motives have always been ambiguous. In his unpublished memoir, he says that he defected to avoid taking the rap for Mxenge's murder. But he told me that leaving South Africa was an act of conscience. And, despite his often repeated remark that he was ready to stand trial, the indictment infuriated him. "During the years of apartheid, I was used by the National Party, and now I am being used by the democratic A.N.C.-led government," he fumed to a reporter.

Jacques Pauw, the journalist who initiated Coetzee's defection to the A.N.C., doesn't trust Coetzee's repentance. "He knows he's *supposed* to say 'I'm sorry,' but there is a difference between that and realizing that what he did was wrong," Pauw says. But many others I talked to disagreed. For reasons base or admirable, Coetzee left his family, language, home, and country to throw himself on the mercy of his enemy. That kind of wrenching break can shatter lifelong views.

The purpose of the Truth Commission's public hearings is to help all South Africans recognize their complicity in apartheid—group therapy for forty-one million people. The report the commission will publish at the end of its tenure will be a comprehensive look at the pattern of human-rights violations and the events that contributed to them. Since Americans have long known so much about apartheid's crimes, it's hard for us to believe that South Africans need a truth commission to reveal them. But even some middle-class blacks I met said that they hadn't known the full picture until now. And it had been easy for whites to deliberately look away. "The apartheid propaganda machine was so strong that some whites could indeed claim they didn't know," Brandon Hamber says. "But it's more that the abuses were known but they had lost context." Violence against blacks was justified as necessary to maintain order. "People need to see the human cost," Hamber explains, "the woman who says, 'The police came in and broke my sewing machine.' It's the small stories that have gone missing."

The Truth Commission hearings could be more effective than trials in showing how apartheid worked. "The problem with trials like Nuremberg is that ordinary Germans could say 'It was all them,' " Charles Villa-Vicencio, the commission's research director, says. "We are trying to enable South Africans of all levels to acknowledge their guilt. There are different levels, but the bystander is still part of it."

Perhaps the crowd in the mall will be touched by months of televised confessions from policemen who sent mail bombs that killed six-year-olds, poisoned clergymen opposed to apartheid, and hacked the arms off their torture victims. Or perhaps not. Shame is a rare and precious thing. "You cannot legislate repentance," Desmond Tutu says. "That is where faith comes in." The Truth Commission is likely to inspire more genuine repentance than any other approach yet tried, but it will still reach only a small portion of apartheid's criminals and bystanders. More will take a second miracle. ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

GRIM FAIRY TALES

It's the end of the century, and the little ones are in for it.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

"Too sad, too sad," says the small boy, reaching out decisively to shut the book on his father's lap. "How can 'The House at Pooh Corner' be *sad*?" asks bewildered Pop. The small boy searches for an explanation. "No *boats*," he says, at last. A veteran "Where the Wild Things Are" reader, in love with Max's voyages, he finds the desultory, motionless conversations of Pooh and Piglet in their rural idyll as trapped and circular as those in "Endgame." There is no point in having an idyllic retreat, he thinks, unless there are Wild Things somewhere to roar and a boat to get you the hell away.

And the moral of that is, whatever moods or messages we encode in our books, kids will find only the ones they need, or want. This roominess of meaning is essential. Children's books, like women's lingerie, have to please two audiences at the same time—one demanding comfort and the other titillation. In this instance, it is the gift-giver who wants the reassurance of a familiar fit and the gift-getter who wants the thrill. The grownup wants a comforting image of childhood, or just a familiar name or story; the child wants a boat, a way out, an example of the Life Beyond. The parent wants to get back. The child wants to get out. One of the things that you learn in Katherine Leiner's fine "First Children," a collection of stories about kids in the White House (Tambourine; $20), is that Teddy Roosevelt's children always wanted him to tell about the cowboy life out West; T.R.'s own favorite book was "The Wind in the Willows."

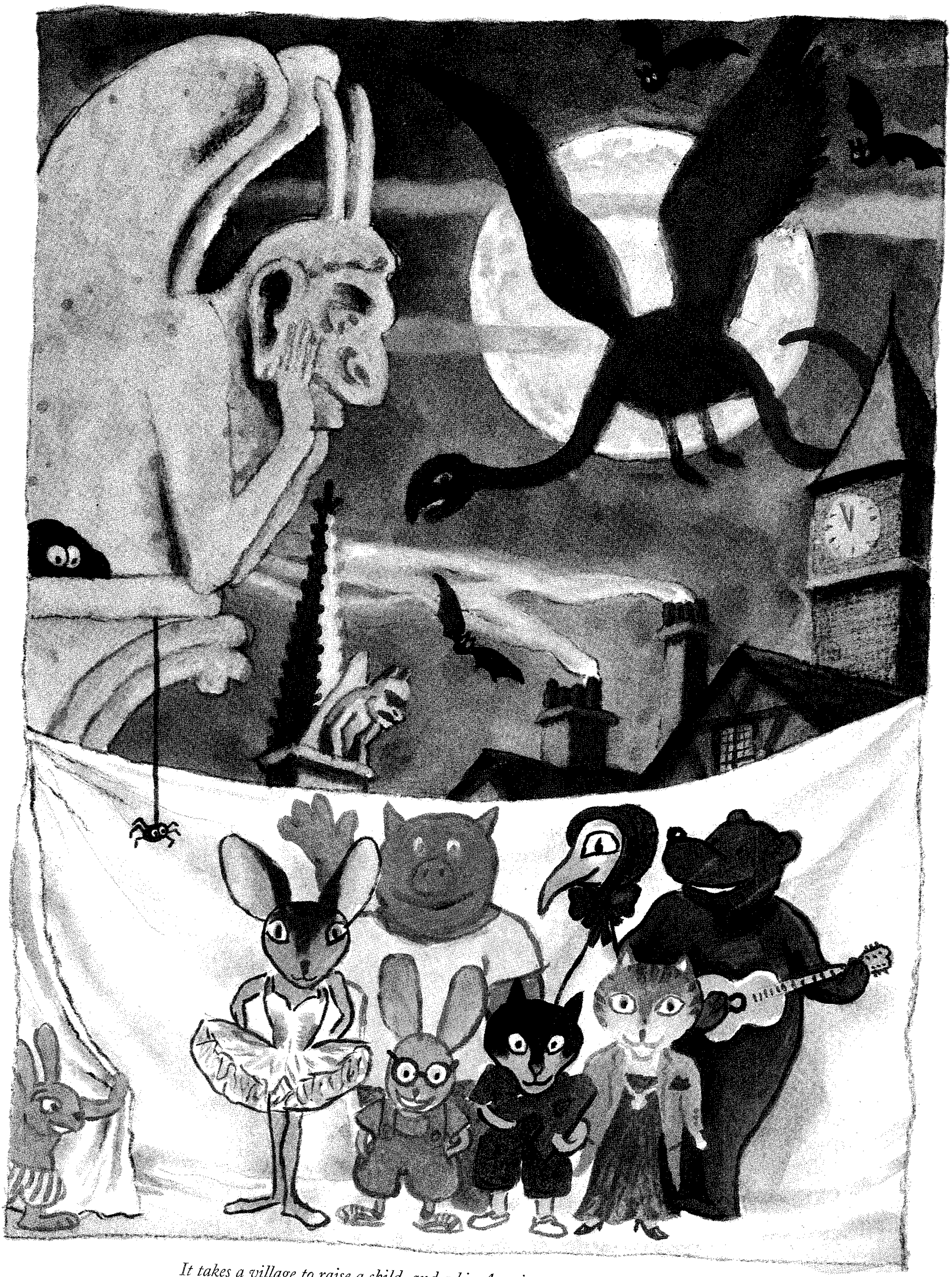
So, though we piously say that children's literature ought to be as various as any other kind of literature, the fact is that we want the same story again and again: a story about how resourcefulness, unburdened by knowledge, conquers an unknown world. Curious George and Mole and Little Black Sambo and Alice and Bilbo Baggins and Charlotte and Fern and Max are not so much innocents abroad as carriers of innate knowledge, who, when they are tested, turn out to be wiser (or meaner, or wilder, or braver) than they had suspected. A children's classic broadly redefines innocence so that it includes surprising areas of knowingness. To be named a thing is to become it: Max is wilder than the Wild Things because his mother says he is; Bilbo is a burglar because the dwarfs call him one; in a suit of Parisian clothes, Babar is King. What makes "Charlotte's Web" a real novel for children, perhaps, rather than a satire or an episodic story, is the way the drama of discovery and common sense is spread out in a gentle triangle: Fern finds the undiscovered world; Wilbur has the problem; and Charlotte has the plan. Even Mary Poppins has nothing more than her immense conceit and sense of herself to get her charges through everything that happens. The best books for children teach parent and child the same lesson, but each takes it in a different spirit: life is easier than it looks; left to your own devices, you'll be O.K. (I knew it all along, the child thinks. Isn't it pretty to think so, the parent knows.)

Against this simple rule runs a contrary belief that what children want from books is instruction and that they deserve to get it, hard. Children's books now arrive, like most American experience, in four fixed categories: the Unbearably Pious, the Unthinkably Gross, the Unashamedly Packaged, and the Unbelievably Depressing. The Pious books show what a mess American history really is, and what a gang of lowlifes most famous Americans have been (with the predictable exceptions of Eleanor Roosevelt and Sitting Bull). The Gross books include tales about Valentine chocolates filled with nose drippings and, in a slightly different, Stephen King manner, bedtime stories of mutilations, decapitations, and mass burial. The Unashamedly Packaged books are usually the works of celebrities, many of whom happen to be dead. The Incredibly Depressing books, meanwhile, include a genre of Young Adult novels that, for gloom, anomie, and generally muddy realism, make Richard Ford look like Mr. Rogers. Gloom is everywhere, even in a well-meant book on death, "When Dinosaurs Die," by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown (Little, Brown; $14.95): it has a glossary in the back that begins, winningly, "autopsy; cemetery; coffin; corpse; cremation; funeral; grave; hearse."

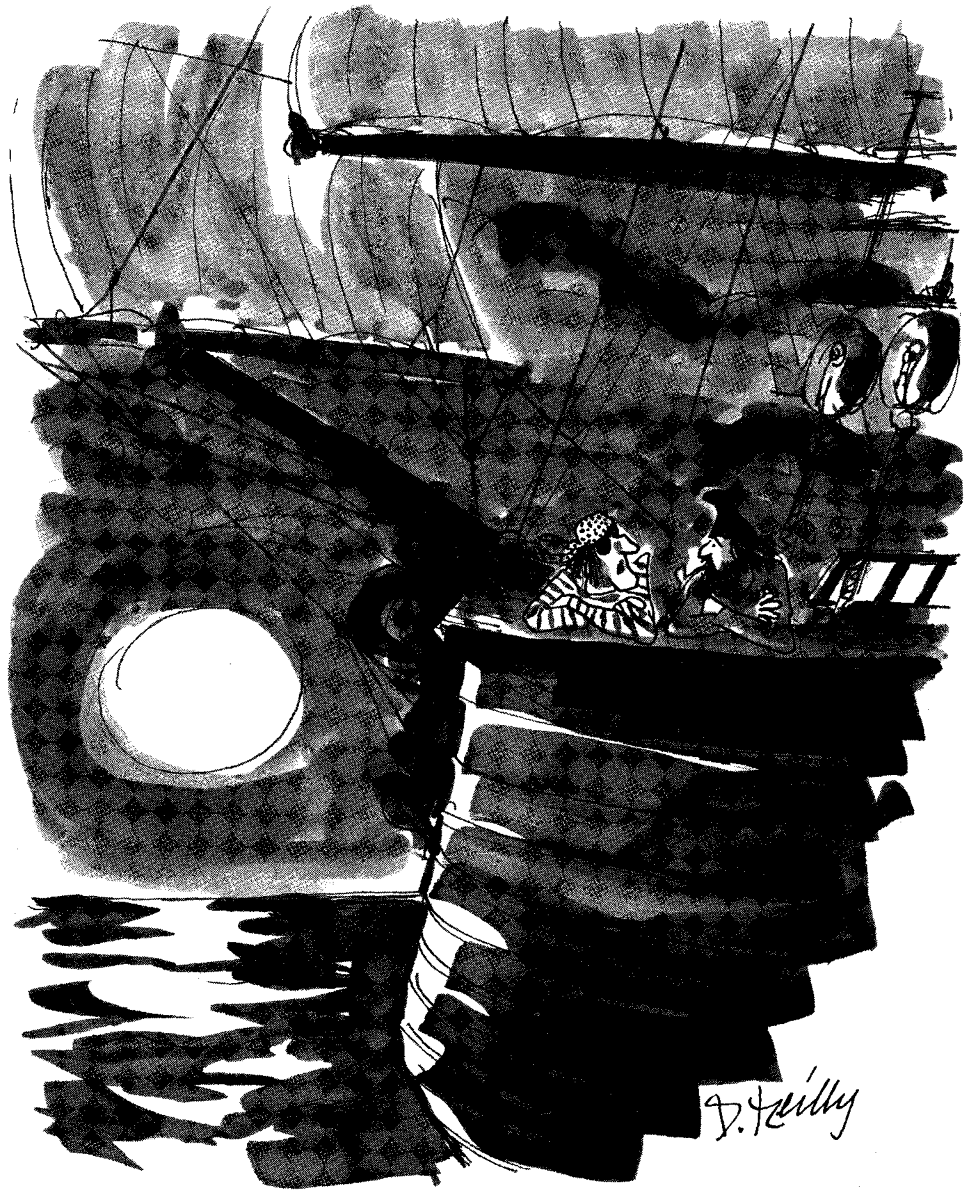
The good news is that in interstices between the set categories there is still enough room for a handful of books to delight or enlighten or stir any reader. But children's books at the end of the century are a startlingly grim business, and it's worth looking at the packages that the grimness comes in, and trying to figure out how they got that way.

Of the four main categories, the Pious is the most overwhelming, and parents may find its examples the hardest to hand to a child in simple, heart-swelling faith. The new Pieties, by now familiar, maintain that the West was won by deceit; that Charles Lindbergh was a Nazi, or nearly one; that Lincoln was an opportunist; and that every American should feel guilty about something. In this year's books for children, illegal immigrants struggle toward the border; a family struggles to survive the Holocaust; slaves struggle for freedom and for their roots; and teen-age lesbian lovers struggle for the right to be themselves the way Nancy Drew and

GERARD NICOLAS



It takes a village to raise a child, and a big American corporation to exploit one.



"I'm your co-mariner, not your matey."

• •

her friend George once struggled to solve the Mystery at the Moss-Covered Mansion. On Christmas Day, the new American child, instructed by "Four Smooth Pebbles: A Holocaust Story," by Lila Perl and Marion Blumenthal Lazan (Greenwillow; $15), can move on to "I Am an American: A True Story of Japanese Internment," by Jerry Stanley (Crown; $9.99). Or he can turn to a good book on the building of the transcontinental railroad—"Full Steam Ahead," by Rhoda Blumberg (National Geographic Society; $18.95)—in which the author darkly describes the men who built the railroad: "Drinking, brawling and occasionally murdering their way across America, they introduced their version of civilization into Indian country." Another good book, "We Shall Not Be Moved," by Joan Dash (Scholastic; $15.95), tells the story of the 1909 Triangle Shirtwaist Company strike, and concludes with an odd separatist message: "Surely this was the most significant gain of the uprising, its revelation of the power that lies in sisterhood, for no band of millionaire men has ever gone to the aid of male workers, yet women of all classes clasped hands and joined forces during the shirtwaist strike." Even Eleanor Roosevelt, who makes appearances in at least two new books, first has to be given a ritual dunking as a victim. In "Eleanor," with story and pictures by Barbara Cooney (Viking; $15.99), we learn that during a vexed transatlantic crossing Eleanor's father threw her from the deck of a faltering liner into a lifeboat: full illustration of a terrified future First Lady being traumatized by an unthinking grownup. Meanwhile, the recrudescent royalist, over on the family right, can take gloomy pleasure in "Lost Tales: Stories for the Romanov Children" (Villard; $35), a collection of newly discovered fables made up by the children of Nicholas and Alexandra, and beautifully illustrated by Gleb Botkin, the young son of the Romanov family doctor, while they were all being held prisoner in Siberian Tobolsk. And Dad can pass around copies of "When Someone in the Family Drinks Too Much," by Richard C. Langsen (Dial; $14.99)—an "easy to understand book for young children" which explains "how children can recognize signs of alcoholism."

Nothing shows the tricks and the complexities of the search for the multicultural and (the phrase will have to come out of the bubble wrap, just this once) the politically correct better than this season's bizarre proliferation of alternative Sambos. Little Black Sambo, as you may remember, is the small dark-skinned boy, invented by Helen Bannerman in 1899, who defeats tigers through a policy of passive resistance, is well dressed, and eats a hundred and sixty-nine pancakes. For a long time, Sambo was left out of the children's canon altogether, in deference to African-American worries about his name and his grin—though his imaginary country, to judge by the tigers and the umbrella, seems to border on India, not Africa. These days, though, he's around in no fewer than four different versions, each one, it seems, specially made to suit one or another constituency in our Balkanized kindergartens. There's the original, or Pat Buchanan, version, by Bannerman (HarperCollins; $13.95), with Sambo grinning and the tigers running; the slightly revised, or William Bennett, version, by Judith Russell (Cherokee; $14.95), with Sambo's mother and father given appropriate Indian names—no longer Black Mumbo and Black Jumbo but Mama Lata and Papa Pran—and the entire setting turned into a workaday Indian reality; a modified, compromised, or Bill Clinton, version called "The Story of Little Babaji," with illustrations by Fred Marcellino (Michael di Capua Books; $14.95), which tries to please everybody, by incorporating a little bit of everything; and, finally, a hard-left, or Hillary Clinton, version, "Sam and the Tigers" (Dial; $15.99), by the wonderful Julius Lester (story) and Jerry Pinkney (pictures), in which the entire tale is retold in black vernacular, with Sambo becoming Sam, and with the action being improbably transplanted to a place that's called Sam-sam-sa-mara but seems like the American South.

It has always been easy to understand why an African-American parent might find the original Sambo book insensitive (just as a Jewish parent drawn to "Oliver Twist" might want to make a quiet alteration in Dickens's repeated insistence on "the Jew"). The real question, though, is why anyone should go to the trouble to take the story out of mothballs and tell it again. Sambo's *is* a good story. Another writer might have made Sambo outwit the tigers, but children, like slaves or oppressed or colonized people generally, know that there is no way to outwit power: you just keep handing over your umbrella and wait for the tigers to destroy themselves. The image of the tigers reducing themselves to butter is a powerful one, evoking, always, a deep, respectful silence. (Some readers may even recall that a discussion of Little Black Sambo was the very last literary conversation in the life of Seymour Glass.)

Still, the truth about the compulsion to retell the story of Black Sambo seems to lie elsewhere than in a simple desire not to see it lost. Richard Goldthwaite, in "The Natural History of Make-Believe" (Oxford; $30), a strangely punitive new book about children's literature, writes of "Alice" that "the lie that Dodgson invented for it was the notion that children's story, or any art, could be a privileged vehicle, exempt from examination or accountability." This puritanical thought seems to find a welcome now in many bosoms. People want to withdraw that exemption from accountability by retelling the old stories in a pointedly "accountable" way. It isn't "Little Black Sambo" 's unconscious racism that offends people. It's the story's naïve universality. The objection is not that Sambo is a little African but that he's not *exactly* a little African, or exactly anything else—that he doesn't belong to any fixed or certain race at all.

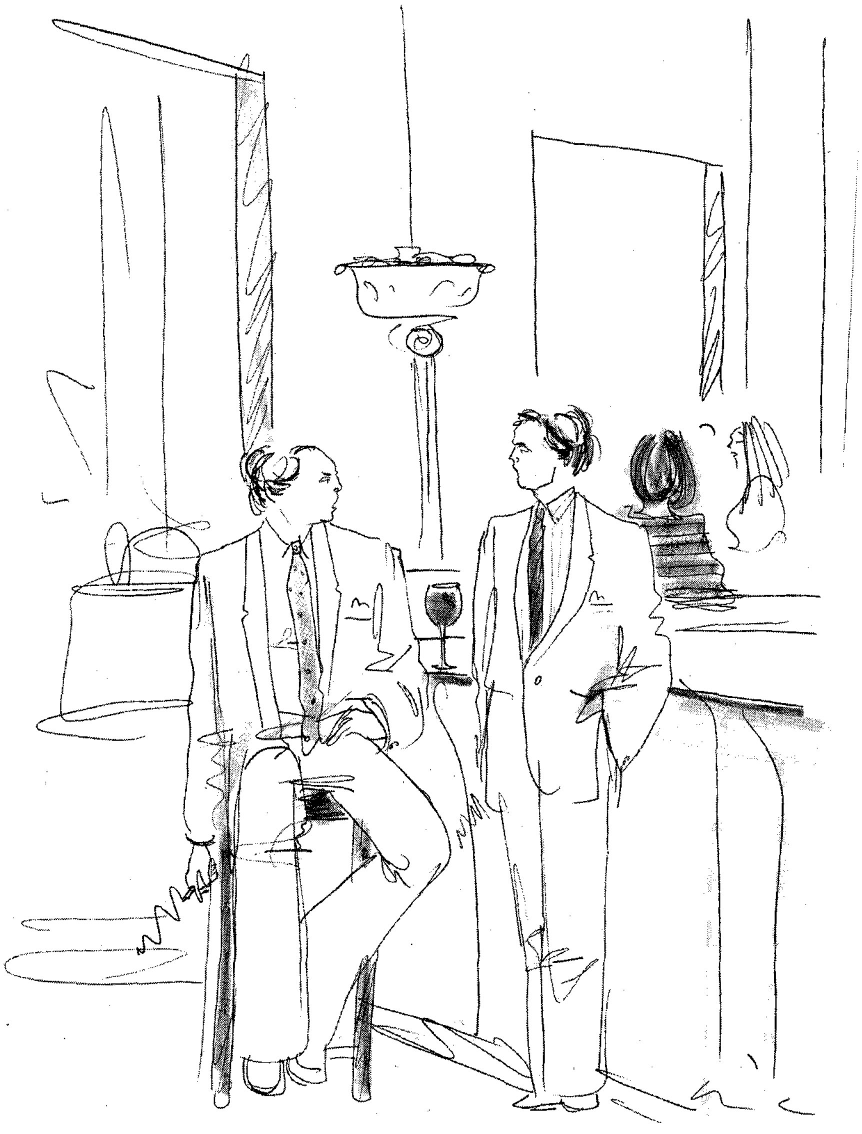
This insistence on a narrow style of ethnic particularism is what's most striking in the current crop of Pieties: the child has to be told where he comes from, not where he is going—connected to his own "tradition" and "identity" instead of taught that he can make up his own. (Their identity was what Dorothy and Babar were both, in their different ways, out to lose.) In "Mimi's Tutu," by Tynia Thomassie, with illustrations by Jan Spivey Gilchrist (Scholastic; $14.95), for instance, a little African-American girl named Mimi envies the tutu worn by another little girl in her ballet class (who happens to be black, too), and wants one for herself. "We understand you've been yearning for a tutu," Gramma M'bewe says. Instead, Mimi gets a "lapa," or wraparound skirt, with a specially designed belt of beige cowrie shells. "This is a skirt that suits *you*, M'bewe Iecine Magalee Isabella," Gramma says. "You'll celebrate your ancestry when you dance in it." But surely Mimi didn't *want* to celebrate her ancestry. What she wanted was a tutu. The lesson here, and it's none too subtle, is that you are what you inherit, tied to earth by your past and your parents. The revisionist books, for all their apparent daring, teach an extraordinarily unrebellious attitude toward authority. A reader of "The Village Basket Weaver," by Jonathan London (Dutton; $14.99), is meant to be comforted by the fact that a small Central American boy, "like his grandfather before him would become the village basket-weaver." Similarly, Rachel, in "The Ugly Menorah," by Marissa Moss (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $14)—this year's most unlovable title—has

"What do you think I think about what you think I think you've been thinking about?"

to learn to love an ugly menorah, because it was her grandfather's. Heaven help her if, like just about every Jewish child who has ever lived in America, what she really wanted was a Christmas tree.

Children's books, we are told, should not be escapist. They should posit the world as it is, rather than the world as our overlords would like us to imagine it. But reality is a mixed neighborhood. No child needs an education in the real: the real keeps its own school, where the bell never rings. What children need is an education in the possible, without which the classes in the other school can give no joy. Seeking to assert the reality of the child's circumstances—ethnic ties, background, tribal identity—the new Pious books ignore the reality of the child's imagination, which is, of necessity, open, outward bound.

Escapism is the sincerest tribute we can pay to reality. Oz is the best critique of Kansas going. Escape, after all, involves a clear-eyed grasp of reality. The man who goes over the wall at Sing Sing has a better grasp of his circumstances than the man who stands there staring at it. Children know perfectly well who they are; all experience conspires to tell them that. What they would like to know is who they may yet be, and what boat they have to take to get there. Little Black Sambo left alone provides a more powerful model of emancipation than Little Black Sambo (or Sam) dragged back to earth. Still, the Sambo controversy does at least supply a good definition of the American liberal, c. 1996: someone who while watching tigers roar in anger and chase each other's tails and turn into butter devotes himself to worrying about the polite thing to call the mother of the little boy hidden behind the tree.



"Nancy is your type. Good-looking, some money, not *too* *much ambition."*

In American books for children, as in American experience, some kind of occult relationship obviously exists between the plague of piety and the accompanying plague of obnoxiousness. The sleep of reason produces monsters, and the sleep of extremely smug reason produces extremely skanky monsters. Just as at some level too much Maya Angelou produces Howard Stern, so the new flood of Pious books, which one suspects are produced mostly for teachers and librarians and worried parents, produces the Gross horror books, which kids actually buy and read. It isn't hard to understand why a teen-ager who has been confronted with "The Last Safe Place on Earth," by Richard Peck (Dell / Laurel-Leaf; $3.99), for instance ("Todd, 15, thinks life in the 'quality community' of Walden Woods is perfect, until Laurel, his dream girl, comes to baby-sit for his sister and reveals the forces of fundamentalism and censorship at work in the town"), will move on to the hugely popular Barf-O-Rama series (Bantam Doubleday Dell), which this season includes "The Great Puke-Off," "The Legend of Bigfart," "Mucus Mansion," and "Garbage Time." ("A helmet full of hurl. You'd think that would be enough to keep Shawn McShalen off the football team for good. But she acted like regurgitated egg salad slithering down her neck was just another bad hair day.") Where the Pious offers the officially real, Barf-O-Rama offers the *really* real. There is, of course, nothing particularly shocking about kids' taste for the disgusting, but the Gross ought to be an illicit genre; that is its virtue. Instead, grownup editors and publishers and salesmen push this stuff on kids, though how they do it without wanting to, well, blow chunks *is* hard to understand. It takes a village to raise a child, and a big American corporation to exploit one.

On another Gross front, the plague of horror stories for tots continues to spread. Horror is now the best-selling genre for kids from eight to twelve, and wary parents have probably already heard of or surrendered to the works of R. L. Stine, who is the most popular author in America, selling four million copies of his books every month. Every chapter in a Stine book ends not on a note of escalating menace but on one more jerk of outright terror: a ghostly hand touches the back of the neck, and somebody (Mom, usually) screams. The horror in these books is horrible. In Stine's "Piano Lessons Can Be Murder," for instance, the campy sense of the grotesque (what grownups like to call stylized or balletic violence) is forever present, but in the climax we find out that the wicked piano teacher has been amputating children's hands. Justice is done—the reanimated hands come to kill him, at last—and, of course, the fear of amputation, though open to Freudian reading, is not a major one for most children. Still, the image of a child's hands being cut off is, well, an image of a child's hands being cut off. The horror books—even the popular "Star Wars" series has now been recast by Bantam as "Star Wars: Galaxy of Fear" (No. 1: "Eaten Alive")—are, among other things, manifestos declaring that mutilation and murder can be sources of entertainment. The "stylization" of the horror—by which people mean a general air of nervous jokiness surrounding it, as in Quentin Tarantino's movies—only makes it worse. Will a child act violent because he has been exposed to this kind of horror? Probably not. The harm that will come to the child from reading this book is that he will have read this book.

WHAT'S alarming about the gross-out and horror books is less their content than the casualness of their packaging. When it comes to merchandising, though, there is still nothing in America like a celebrity. It is some sign of the condition of the books we give our kids that one feel-good triumph of this season's list is a posthumous work by Sylvia Plath. Dubious readers who expect from the gloomy poet a sort of "Ariel" set to the rhythms of Dr. Seuss ("It's black on black / The Grinch insists! / Let's all go home / and slash our wrists") may find the Plath book, "The It-Doesn't-Matter Suit" (St. Martin's; $10.95), disappointing. This reader, having tried to scale the mountain several times, is bound to report that it is nearly unclimbable, despite the best efforts of the illustrator, Rotraut

SHORT LIST FOR CHILDREN

HEREWITH, a prejudiced, unprincipled, arbitrary list of seasonal books guaranteed to bring pleasure to any young reader.

My Very First Mother Goose, edited by Iona Opie, illustrated by Rosemary Wells (Candlewick; $19.99). The living saint of children's rhymes offers her own priceless collection of the best of them, which, she says wisely, suggest to newcomers to this world "that mishaps might be funny rather than tragic, that tantrums can be comical as well as frightening, and that laughter is the cure for practically everything."

Cupid and Psyche, as told by M. Charlotte Craft and illustrated by K. Y. Craft (Morrow; $16). A retelling of the myth of the most beautiful woman in the world, and how she learns to value courage more than beauty, this is, if not the most courageous, then certainly the most beautiful book of the year. K. Y. Craft's illustrations combine Botticelli, the Pre-Raphaelites, and the nocturnal landscapes of the German Romantics to create a series of images that are the most haunting since Chris Van Allsburg's.

God Bless the Gargoyles, story and paintings by Dav Pilkey (Harcourt, Brace; $15). Gargoyles come to life and fly, with their guardian angels, to the homeless in New York. In its combination of fantasy and soul ("God bless the ones who sing everything wrong / God bless all creatures who do not belong"), this fable offers a prime instance of how to teach morality without inculcating morals.

A Shorter Shakespeare is a new, pocket-size series from Macmillan ($9.95 each), which combines excerpts from the great plays with helpful summaries and fanciful illustrations by Cal Williams. Whether it will work or not is hard to guess, but it's a noble try.

Metropolis: Ten Cities / Ten Centuries, by Albert Lorenz, with Joy Schleh (Abrams; $17.95). This story of cities, from eleventh-century Jerusalem to contemporary New York, is so packed with information and visual excitement that it causes brain strain even in urban adults.

When Birds Could Talk & Bats Could Sing, by Virginia Hamilton, illustrated by Barry Moser (Blue Sky/Scholastic; $17.95). Wonderful retellings of classic African-American folk tales—tales that were first collected in the eighteen-eighties and, remade for our time, sparkle with charm and common sense.

Old Pig, by Margaret Wild, illustrated by Ron Brooks (Dial; $14.99). A heartbreaking, gentle, perfectly indirect story about the last days on earth of an elderly pig offers a better introduction to the fact and poetry of mortality than many a more studied attempt.

Who Wakes Rooster? by Clare Hodgson Meeker, illustrated by Megan Halsey (Simon & Schuster; $13). A child on a farm solves an eternal conundrum: how do you get the sun to wake up the rooster?

The War Between the Vowels and the Consonants, by Priscilla Turner (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $15). A charming fantasy about a civil war within the alphabet, which teaches the virtues of linguistic coexistence.

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse, by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow; $15). A story about a mouse-girl with a plastic purse, movie-star sunglasses, and an incredible teacher.

The Secret Shortcut, by Mark Teague (Scholastic; $14.95). Two boys, trying to get to school a little early, get lost in the jungle of their imaginations.

The Bee and the Dream: A Japanese Tale, adapted by Jan Freeman Long, illustrated by Kaoru Ono (Dutton; $15.99). A lovely adaptation of a Japanese folktale about a man who buys a dream, and the adventures it inspires, all leading to the consoling moral "If good fortune is meant for you, no matter what happens, it will be yours."

The 12 Days of Christmas, by Robert Sabuda (Little Simon; $19.95). The most elaborate, lavish, and amazingly engineered pop-up book of the season, with the pop-ups all in plain, snowy, holiday white.

The West: An Illustrated History for Children, by Dayton Duncan (Little, Brown; $19.95). One of three companion volumes to Ken Burns's PBS series, it tells the essential story with calm, aplomb, precision, and a wealth of black-and-white photographs. A model of how to present history without hard-selling it.

Tumble Bumble, by Felicia Bond (Front Street; $13.95). An oddly cheering story in rhyme about an ever-growing group of animal friends out for a promenade, which seems to exercise a magical fascination for very young readers.

One Windy Wednesday, by Phyllis Root, illustrated by Helen Craig (Candlewick; $9.99). A perfect first book: the wind blows up a storm, and, for a brief time, all the animals exchange voices—"The wind blew so hard it blew the quack right out of the duck." The little girl at the center of things keeps her head.

Susanne Berner. The story, which takes a long while building, is about a little boy named Max Nix, who wants a suit. He gets a mustard-yellow one, and then nothing much happens, but the motionlessness of the story is less likely to bore children than the coyly complacent language. One of Max's brothers wonders "how it would be to wear the woolly, whiskery, brand-new mustard-yellow suit for milking the cows. Such a suit had never been seen before in all Winkelburg. What would the cows think? Perhaps they would take him for a bundle of whiskery yellow hay and nibble at his collar."

Something arch and unfortunate often seems to happen when masters of plain speech and the American idiom write for children. Both our best vernacular storyteller and our best vernacular playwright have children's books out, both books are in rhyme, and both are disappointments. Garrison Keillor's "The Old Man Who Loved Cheese" (Little, Brown; $14.95) tells the story of a smelly guy who gives up eating cheese for the sake of his family. The fable seems fine, but this most local of all good writers has set his story neither in Lake Wobegon nor in New York but in that lovable, placeless world of cute firemen and sententious judges where too many kids' books are set already. As for our playwright, David Mamet, his "The Duck and the Goat" (St. Martin's; $16.95) also seems oddly unlocalized, and the nonsense rhymes seem less carefree than preoccupied: "But the Turbaned Turk chafed at his line / And railed at the swell of the Salty Brine / For he pined for the love of a Porcupine / He had seen in the Ballets Russes."

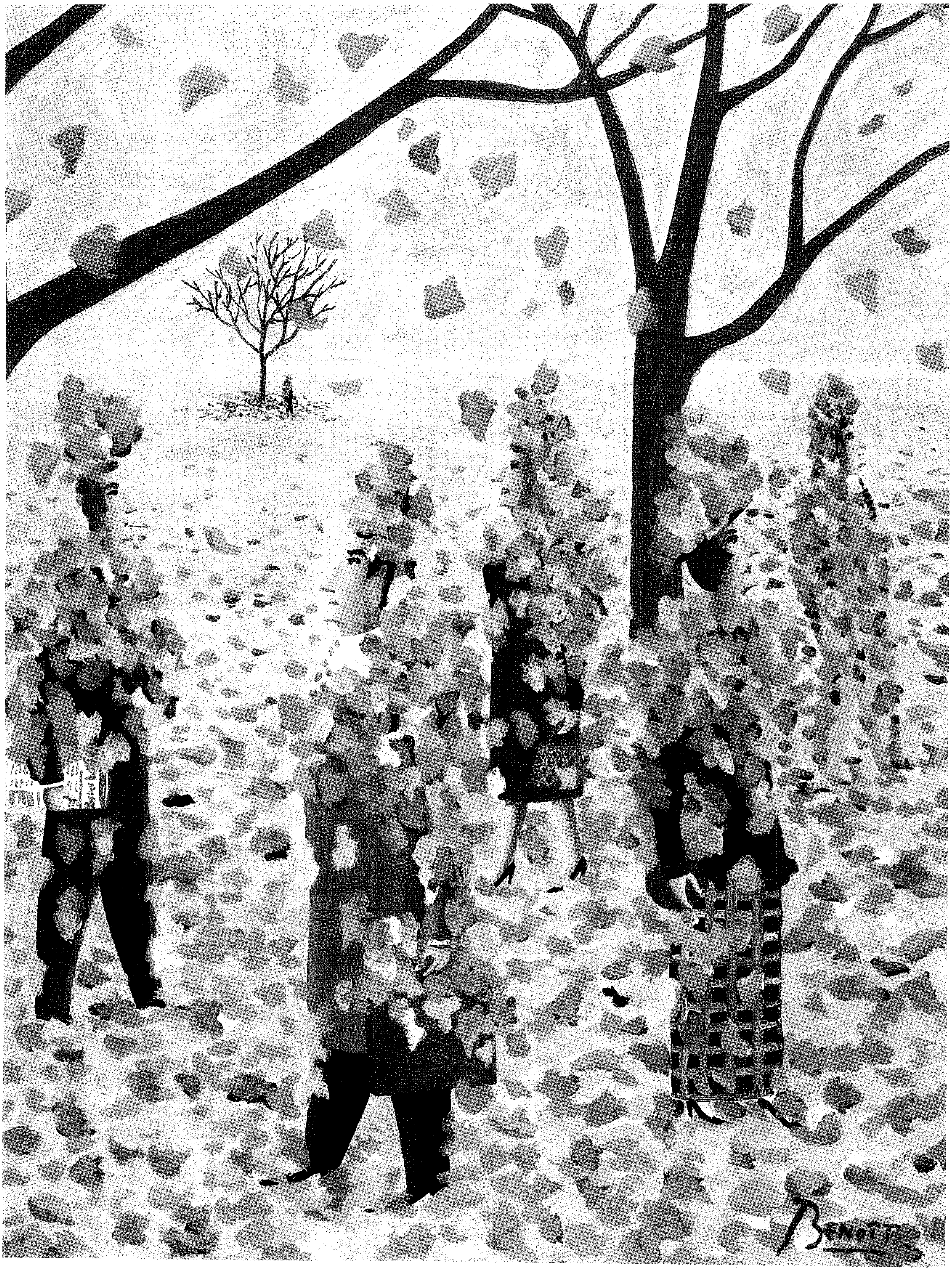
In addition to Plath, two other famous names make posthumous appearances. Each is wrapped up, "Free As a Bird" style, in a setting too rich for the original slip of a notion, but, as with the Beatles recording, there is still something moving about the wraith, sounding ghostly in the mix. Orson Welles has a packaged version of a book about a saint's festival in Saint-Tropez, which he wrote for his daughter back in the fifties. "Les Bravades," as it's called (Workman; $19.95), has drawings by Welles, too, done in a Bemelmans-cum-Dufy manner, and, while it's less a pronouncement than an echo, it's an echo of an enormous voice. Dr. Seuss himself reappears, with a new book, "My Many Colored Days" (Knopf; $16), illustrated by the husband-and-wife team of Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher, not by Seuss himself. (The publisher's package declares that the good Doctor had always wanted another artist for this book.) In the endless, tail-biting arrangements of modern life, celebrity chases itself around a tree, like the tigers in "Sambo," until everything turns to (slightly rancid) butter.

THE older-reader, or Young Adult, category is where the voguish concentration of preachiness, teachiness, and a misguided sense of realism produces the most intense despondency. Oddly, this despondency goes hand in hand with a remarkably high level of literary accomplishment. American voices fall naturally into the adolescent manner—there are listeners who doubt whether they ever fall as naturally into any other—and the license that Y.A.s have been granted means that they have a surer, more immediate contact with the details of American life than many of their adult counterparts.

There are, nevertheless, some abundantly cheerful Y.A.s out this season, including the sparkling and charming "Sea Monkey Summer," by Cheryl Ware (Orchard; $14.95), a novel-in-letters about a little girl with a paper route. (The owner of the Sea Monkey trademark objected to her doubts about the Sea Monkeys; the book will be re-released in April as "Flea Circus Summer.") More typical is the excellent, despondent "Wrestling Sturbridge," by Rich Wallace (Knopf; $16), which is set in the Harry Angstrom country of failed-industrial Pennsylvania and written in the Harry Angstrom manner of the first-person historical present but, when it comes to American gloom, makes "Rabbit, Run" look like "Peter Rabbit." On page 2, the narrator explains, casually, "We didn't bother going to the football game. It's the last game, but we're all in our own worlds tonight and didn't want any distractions. And I've avoided public places since I beat up that minister." Even Rabbit only scoffed at men of God instead of actually mugging them. The book tells of the travails of a high-school wrestling team, in the kind of country where a mall holds out the promise of civil society: "The radio's going and there are a lot of younger kids downtown—freshmen and sophomores mostly, hanging out in front of stores, wishing they had something to do. The biggest group is in front of the movie theater, which shut down about six years ago and has been vacant ever since. The cops will chase them away any minute now." The story of interracial love and failed wrestling is well told and very well written, but anyone who can recall what once passed for juvenile sports fiction—a genre in which the worst thing a young "prospect" could do was to swing at a 3-and-0 pitch while the take sign was on—may have trouble figuring out exactly what experience a young reader is meant to take away from "Wrestling Sturbridge." In "Danger Zone," by David Klass (Scholastic; $16.95), a basketball player from Minnesota makes a junior Dream Team. The story, though, is not an uplifting one of international understanding but about racism (he is kidnapped by a resentful teammate and shown ghetto life) and media-savvy packaging (he asks himself not "Can I make this jump shot?" but "Did the sponsor put me on this team because I'm white?") and ends with the hero simultaneously winning the game with a last-second pressure basket *and* being shot by a crazed racist terrorist. Among books with a more feminine cast are "Facing the Music," by Margaret Willey (Delacorte; $14.95), which tells the sad story of a grunge-rock band that includes a brother-and-sister team ("Mark comes home even later than Dad now," the sister writes. "The beer and cigarette fumes on him are so thick that I can smell him right through the walls"), and what happens when the brother tries to push the sister out of the band, and the very fine "Belle Prater's Boy," by Ruth White (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $16), about a mysterious vanishing in a small town, which ends with the heroine, Gypsy, realizing that "Aunt Belle had left Woodrow on purpose just like my daddy left me. Not because they didn't love us. They did. But their pain was bigger than their love." Too sad, too sad. And not a boat in sight. ♦

EASEL BY BENOÎT VAN INNIS

THE FALL COLLECTION



FICTION

Y CHROMOSOME

Preprandial patriarchy.

BY DONALD ANTRIM

MY brothers Rob, Bob, Tom, Paul, Ralph, Phil, Noah, William, Nick, Dennis, Christopher, Frank, Simon, Saul, Jim, Henry, Seamus, Richard, Jeremy, Walter, Jonathan, James, Arthur, Rex, Bertram, Vaughan, Daniel, Russel, and Angus; and the triplets, Herbert, Patrick, and Jeffrey; identical twins Michael and Abraham, Lawrence and Peter, Winston and Charles, Scott and Samuel; and Eric, Donovan, Roger, Lester, Larry, Clinton, Drake, Gregory, Leon, Kevin, and Jack—all born on the same day, the twenty-third of May, though at different hours in separate years; and the caustic graphomaniac, Sergio, whose scathing opinions appear with regularity in the front-of-book pages of the more conservative monthlies, not to mention on the liquid-crystal screens that glow at night atop the radiant workstations of countless bleary-eyed computer-bulletin-board subscribers (among whom our brother is known, affectionately, electronically, as Surge); and Albert, who is blind; and Siegfried, the sculptor in burning steel; and clinically depressed Anton, schizophrenic Irv, recovering addict Clayton; and Maxwell, the tropical botanist, who, since returning from the rain forest, has seemed a little screwed up somehow; and Jason, Joshua, and Jeremiah, each vaguely gloomy in his own "lost boy" way; and Eli, who spends solitary wakeful evenings in the tower, filling notebooks with drawings—the artist's multiple renderings for a larger work?—portraying the faces of his brothers, including Chuck, the prosecutor; Porter, the diarist; Andrew, the civil-rights activist; Pierce, the designer of radically unbuildable buildings; Barry, the good doctor of medicine; Fielding, the documentary-film maker; Spencer, the spook with known ties to the State Department; Foster, the "new millennium" psychotherapist; Aaron, the horologist; Raymond, who flies his own plane; and George, the urban planner, who, if you read the papers, you'll recall, distinguished himself not so long ago with that innovative program for revitalizing the decaying downtown area (as "an animate interactive diorama illustrating contemporary cultural and economic folkways"), only to shock and amaze everyone, absolutely everyone, by vanishing with a girl named Jane and an overnight bag packed with municipal funds in unmarked hundreds; and all the young fathers: Seth, Rod, Vidal, Bennet, Dutch, Brice, Allan, Clay, Vincent, Gustavus, and Joe; and Hiram, the eldest; Zachary, the giant; Jacob, the polymath; Virgil, the compulsive whisperer; Milton, the channeller of spirits who speak across time; and the really bad womanizers: Stephen, Denzil, Forrest, Topper, Temple, Lewis, Mongo, Spooner, and Fish; and, of course, our celebrated "perfect" brother, Benedict, recipient of a medal of honor from the National Academy of Sciences for work over twenty years in chemical transmission of "sexual language" in eleven types of social insects—all of us (except George, about whom there have been many rumors, rumors upon rumors: he's fled the vicinity, he's right here under our noses, he's using an alias or maybe several, he has a new face, that sort of thing), all my ninety-eight, not counting George, brothers and I recently came together in the red library and resolved that the time had arrived, finally, to stop being blue, put the past behind us, and share a light supper.

It was a wretched, pewter-colored day. The red library walls were haunted by shadows cast from a multitude of low-wattage reading lamps that haloed the tables as we flopped down on sofas and chairs overhung by English hunt prints and the heads of game animals, mounted, desolate, African, gazing out from rectangles of wall framed in wood shelves crowded with works by obscure poets.

"I hate this room. It stinks of death," whispered Virgil, wedged beside me on a love seat.

A line of our brothers scuffed past in search of places to sit. The library was filling with male energy and low sounds of voices saying, "Hey, man, scoot over and make space." The musty air would soon grow lush with our smells of sweat, shaving lotions, exhaled humid breaths. God help us. Suddenly, from a distant corner of the room—a crash, the jolting shatter of glass exploding, a lamp going down. This mishap appeared to be the work of Max, who, startled by the overturned light's impact and the noisy report of breaking china, stopped for a moment to stare down at a lamp cord snarled around his ankle, the black electrical line snaking across the floor through porcelain strewn in a brilliant white ruin near his shoes, before looking up to gaze slowly around the hushed room, then ask no one in particular, "Did I do that?"

Poor Maxwell. Ever since his return, last month, from a pharmacological-botanical specimen-gathering expedition, he's been noticeably agitated, clumsy and distracted in the manner of one plagued by either fever or crisis. Apparently, something strange had happened in Costa Rica, and now Max was walking into things and breaking them, at a rate of about one electrical fixture, decorative serving dish, potted plant, or item of statuary every three days.

"What's wrong with him, do you think?" Virgil whispered barely audibly in my ear.

Together we watched Max kneel unsteadily down among the lamp shards. Siegfried and Stephen, both standing in Max's vicinity, crouched beside their brother, helped him collect fragments, which they all painstakingly swept—six outstretched, middle-aged hands raking and pawing the carpet for nuggets of porcelain and indiscernible, translucent bulb splinters—into a tidy pile. I was astounded by how fat Stephen had become. Just looking at him made me want a whiskey-and-soda. He scooped a quantity of particles into his soft hands and trotted off toward the fireplace, where, despite the fact that it was sufficiently warm in the room—and would become, what with the steady infiltration of more and more of our bodies, suffocatingly so—old Hiram was leaning on his walker, performing his customary patriarchal act of rudely supervising the construction of yet another of his stupendous, raging fires.

"Ball those tight!" Hiram screeched at Donovan crumpling Sunday-newspaper sections, lobbing these into the grate.

Hiram is ninety-three and universally despised for his humiliating cruelties.

"Examine the flue!" he commanded, as Stephen approached, with his hands cupped as if bearing something disagreeable, which, on arriving at the red brick fireside, he flung away—a scatter of powder and detritus that clouded the hearth with granular smog.

Immediately Hiram seized his walker and clattered backward, fleeing grime.

"Oh, my shoes, look at my shoes," he cried as a second cargo of glass and dust and several large, knife-edged porcelain fragments, carried by Maxwell, made uneasy passage toward the fireside. We watched in horror. Everything was an obstacle, and Max seemed, with each wavering, anxious footfall, on the verge of keeling over. He vaulted an ottoman that appeared suddenly in his path. "Oh! Oh!" Hiram hollered as Max cleared a big Persian carpet, hit the hardwood, lost his balance, and flew into a run/slide/stagger across the floorboards, toward Hiram still clutching his walker. Max's arms thrashed, and it appeared he would crash into our eldest brother and cut off his head with the serrated porcelain he was brandishing. Hiram cowered and, using the waist-high, wraparound frame of the walker as a protective metal barricade, lowered his head between his bent elbows, thrust the walker before him, and braced for collision. He showed admirable form—he'd once played sports!—letting the walker absorb the initial impact before recoiling from the main force of Max's oncoming midsection with a sideways feint-and-parry maneuver that would've been nice to watch on instant replay.

Max veered away. Hiram shook his fist—in anger, it seemed; actually, pain. He'd suffered an injury to the wrist, so easy to do at his advanced age. Now he clasped this brittle hand and crumpled over—automatically, self-protectively, in the manner of a man who has hammered his thumb. He shook out the hand and made a face. Of course, Barry came from wherever he was sitting to have a look. Barry's a caring physician and a loyal brother. He gives us all plenty of complimentary medical counselling, as well as phoned-in prescriptions for tetracycline or a refill of antidepressants.

Max in the meantime continued to weave. He still held that porcelain. What was he doing? Warding off an invisible enemy?

"I wouldn't mind a hit of whatever he's on," whispered Virgil as the whirling botanist sheered back onto the Persian rug and into a crowd of twins. The twins invariably bunch together in a pack during social functions, refusing to mix with the rest of us. Suddenly, in rushed Max, a berserker in their midst, scattering three out of four identical twosomes. That was when I noticed Max was wearing one of my favorite Italian ties. Isn't that the way in families? Someone's always rifling your closet.

"My tie!" I called across the room. The tie whipped and fluttered, as if blown in a wind.

But there was no actual breeze, only fear and turmoil, as guys of all ages got hastily up from their seats and retreated toward the bookshelves and the recessed window casements—a ring of brothers gazing in at Max with the same blankly frightened expressions worn by the taxidermized wildebeests and elk that loomed so dolefully overhead.

Quietly, I said to Virgil, "Where's Zachary when you need him?"

"Fuck Zachary."

"Yeah, no shit. Fuck that guy."

"You know what I mean?"

"Yeah. Absolutely."

What *did* Virgil mean, exactly? And why was I agreeing with him?

"We're related to pigs," decreed Virgil.

Virgil was evidently slipping into one of his moods. It is hardly my intention to take issue with another person's misery; nevertheless, I should say right now that in this or any family certain moods will be dominant and chronic to the extent that they are perceived no longer as moods but as shared attributes—those supervening aspects of character that, because supervening, come to signify membership in a family circle. The collective persona of this family could reasonably be described as frantic, romantic, lethargic, sarcastic, fearful, frustrated, tipsy, pugnacious, unchaste, heartless, dog-eat-dog, borderline narcissistic, nervously narrow-minded, and more or less resigned to despair although occasionally festive when inebriated. This can be problematic. The fact that we all abide depression does not lessen the pain of the lonely sufferer lost among raucous celebrants. When dealing with Virgil, I always assume the worst. "Don't make me ask Barry to give you a shot," I told him, and he lowered his head in his hands and groaned. As usual, I had taken the wrong course.

"I'm sorry, Virgil. I didn't mean that."

"Yes, you did. You pretend you're my ally, but you're the same as all the rest."

"No one is going to give you a shot."

"Why do you have to say something like that? You know how that makes me feel."

"I said I was sorry. I'll say it again. I'm sorry. It was a stupid and insensitive thing to say. I shouldn't've. Here"—putting my arm gently around his shoulders, giving a supportive, brotherly squeeze—"it's O.K., it's O.K. Calm down. Everything will be all right."

"I don't want to be that way anymore, Doug. I don't want to be the way I was."

"You won't."

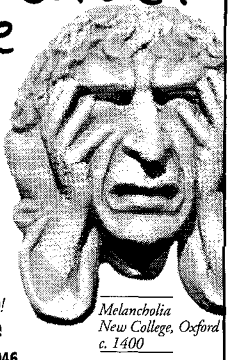
"Promise?"

"Yes."

He hunched over, head in hands. Virgil's body shivered, and he sounded as if he might be crying. "I want to die," he said.

"We're all going to die soon enough, Virgil. There's no reason to wish for death."

At which point, and as if on cue, Max tumbled to the floor. It was beautiful and balletic: Maxwell's body arcing downward in face-forward descent with arms extended overhead, still holding the pieces of the heirloom lamp, ablaze in the reflective incandescence of reading lamps constellated on tables everywhere—our homey little indoor Milky Way of forty-watt bulbs lighting up the library's run-



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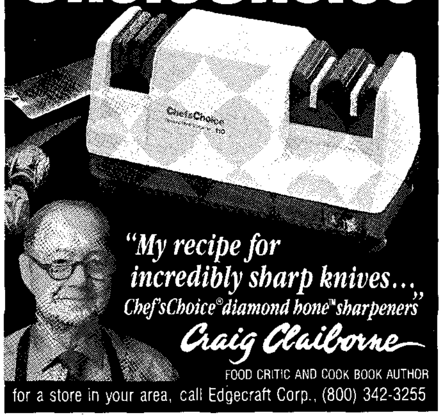

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down leather furniture and desiccated animal heads and innumerable, dusty, unread books—as Maxwell's long body plunged belly-flopping toward a moth-eaten carpet that had bunched in folds set to snare and entangle the botanist's drunken feet.

"The God is among us!" the falling man shouted out on his way down.

Then, *thump.*

"Ouch!" someone nearby exclaimed, reflexively, as Max made contact.

"Good Lord," said a voice.

"Doctor!" called another.

"He freaked out," Siegfried muttered.

"He tried to assassinate me!" wailed Hiram. He heaved up an arm. He displayed his swollen hand. His face showed pain.

"Us, too!" chorused twins Winston and Charles in unison.

By this time Barry'd made it to Max's side and was kneeling in doctorly fashion, attending to the toppled man. Max lay flat on his stomach, not moving at all. Barry reached out to examine him; he pressed for heart's cadence above Max's collar.

"Give me a hand here, someone," Barry said without looking up at anyone in particular.

Nobody moved. And then a little clique in front seemed to wake up. Three came forward and positioned themselves around Maxwell. Following the doctor's instructions—"It doesn't appear that anything is broken. I want to try to get him turned over. Winston, put your hand under Max's knees. Siegfried, watch his arms. Christopher, you hold his feet. I've got the head. O.K., we're going to lift and roll, gently, on three. To the right. Careful. One, two, *three*"—they grunted and shifted the prone man from his stomach to his back.

In other parts of the library, other things were taking place. It is possible, in a room such as this, for many activities to occur simultaneously, without significantly disturbing the informal reader or browser paging through *baroque musical scores* or the occasional literary, scientific, or heraldic tract pried from the heart of an uncatalogued loose stack. I mention our heraldic holdings because they are of special interest to me. Genealogy—and by genealogy I mean more than mere sketching and labelling of family-tree diagrams; rather, the deep investigation into bloodline and blood's congenital inheritances, particularly in connection with insane monarchs—has become a primary avocation of mine. I'm not crazy. But I do have the blood of an insane monarch running through my veins. We all do. I wanted to know what, if anything, this might portend. So I've been spending nights doing layman's research into intrafamilial sociobiological matters, spreading decomposing documents on the oak table beneath the rose window that would look down—if you could only see through those darkly stained indigo panes—onto cobbled footpaths and stone bridges here and there traversing grassy plots, onto the several interconnected, smelly, evaporating ponds encircled with old trees that were lush once, though never tall, bowed lower still by their years, and all but leafless on their way to dying, our former topiary garden. So much here suffers decline.

"Is it cold in here or is it me?" whispered Virgil.

"There is definitely a draft," I told him. His body, squeezed close beside mine on our tasselled and embroidered love seat, felt damply warm; his cheeks and white forehead wore that pasty sheen that accompanies Virgil's recurrent nighttime fevers. "Do you want my sweater?"

"No."

"Are you feeling all right?"

"Once Hiram gets the fire going I'll be fine."

"Sure?"

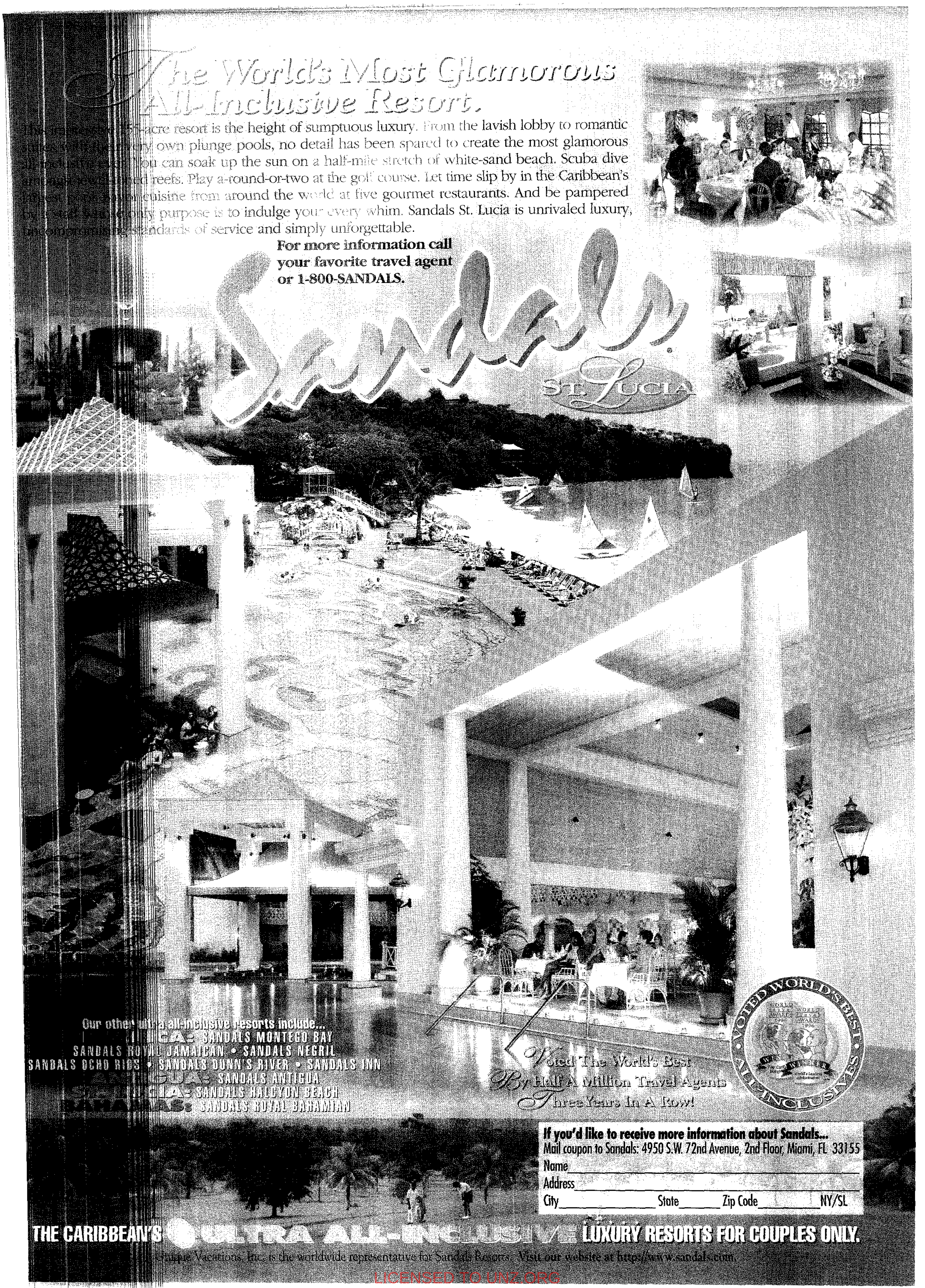
"Positive."

"Let me know."

"Kind of you. Thanks."

We turned our gazes then to take in the scene around Maxwell. The fallen man was laid out on his back and surrounded by feet. Maxwell wasn't moving. His clothes were a mess. At his head knelt Barry. Barry seemed to be reaching inside Maxwell's mouth. Yes, Barry did have a hand in Maxwell's mouth, fishing around there. Then he removed the hand. He took a vast inspiration of breath. Barry pinched Maxwell's nose shut between fingers and thumb, lowered his own mouth to Maxwell's, and blew a series of puffs.

"It's nice to have everyone together again, isn't it?" a voice near me said. I turned and saw, in the shadows, a man



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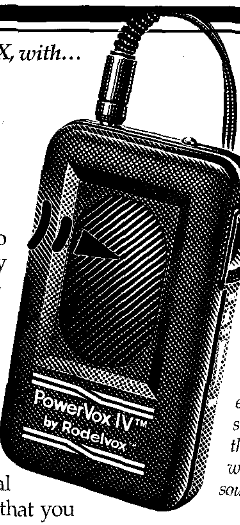

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bearing flowers. This man said, "All the old faces. All the familiar voices."

"Hello?"

"It's me, Doug. It's William."

"William!"

"Don't be frightened. I brought these," he said, stepping partway out from darkness with pale flowers held before him. This gave me an excuse to get up from the love seat, to get away from my brother Virgil. I rose and went to William, who said, "Lilies brighten a room."

"Yes," I agreed.

"Take them."

"Me?"

"Put them out on a table, somewhere in the light, where people can enjoy them."

"Are you sure?"

"Why not?"

"You brought them, William. Wouldn't you like to find a spot for them? Let everyone know you brought flowers. I'm sure it will mean a lot."

"I'd rather not, Doug. I don't think I can bear to talk to everyone right now. Maybe later"—sighing.

"I understand."

"Take the flowers? Please?" he said, and offered me these lilies. I accepted and told him, "They're very beautiful. You're kind to bring them. Thank you, William."

"You're welcome, Doug." He retreated into the shadows. His retreating voice said, "You look good, Doug. Life is treating you well. Let's chat sometime."

Then he was gone behind European Folklore and Mythology, and I clutched the lilies he had brought for us.

In the library's open spaces men tramped singly or with buddies toward the drinks table. Others already with drinks stood drinking.

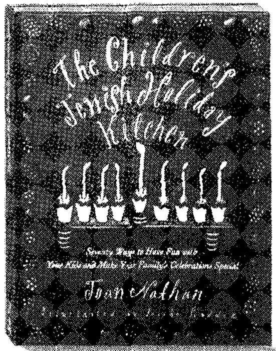
And here came Hiram's walker, clacking across the floorboards. Clack, clack. It seemed to me that the walker should have worn rubber pads, to muffle sound and increase traction. It sounded as if Hiram were gouging the floor with a trowel. Each step brought scuffing and digging.

Hiram paused and glared in my direction. He inhaled a shallow breath. He was having trouble and his mouth was working. He said, "Doug, do you think you might grace us tonight with the costumed dance of our ancestors?"

"It's crossed my mind."

"I think I speak for all of us when I say that your performance is something we look forward to enjoying on nights like tonight."

Make a Memory...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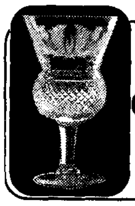

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"I'm glad to hear that, Hiram. I think it's valuable for us, as a family, to have our annual reminder of who we are and where we come from, in a cultural sense. The Corn King is as much a part of our collective history as are, well, these animals that father shot"—waving my arm at a cheetah and a couple of denuded wildebeests.

Hiram nodded and said, "I couldn't agree more, Doug. I always look forward to the winter night when you take off your clothes and put on the mask made of wood and hair."

"Yes."

"I especially like the chase through the library. What a thrill."

"It's always exciting for me, too, Hiram."

He said, "The late-night cries of strong young men take me back to my own youth. In those days we had pain and lots of it. Where did you get those flowers?"

"William."

"You should trim their stalks and put them in a vase before they turn brown and die."

"I was looking for a vase, actually."

"There's one somewhere. You'll find it," he said as he gripped the walker with his good hand; he heaved himself up, scooted the walker forward on the floor, took another labored step (onto the edge of the carpet with its knotted fringe that caught and became tangled as the walker's legs scraped past) in the direction of the oak table. He said, "I don't know about you, but I'm famished. I could eat a side of beef if I had my original teeth. Remember always to care for your teeth, Doug."

"I will."

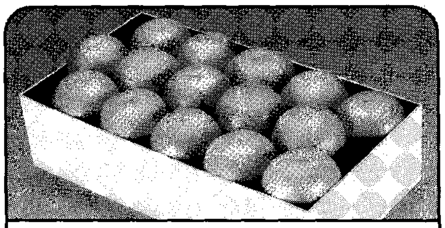
"Do you floss? Flossing is more important than brushing, I can tell you. Too much vigorous brushing as a young man was my downfall. You scrub away the gums and before you know it the roots of your teeth are exposed to the elements and it murders you to chew, and then one after another you lose your teeth like you lose everything in life."

"I'll remember that."

"Your teeth are your greatest possession. You probably think your greatest possession is your johnson. But it's not your johnson, it's your teeth, especially your two front teeth."

"Hmm."

"These right here," he said, opening his mouth wide to insert fingers. He



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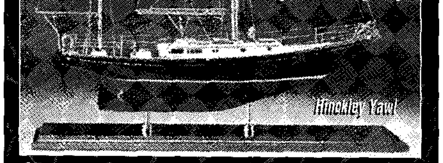

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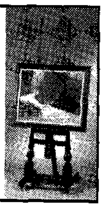

touched the teeth in question, the upper incisors, and when he did they moved. They were loose in his mouth, insecurely fitted and slipping off the gum, hanging at an angle, and about to fall out, as he commanded, "Stow those flowers in a vase before the petals fall off."

"Yes, sir."

Damn. Here I was again in the old unconscious complicity with Hiram's authoritarian posturing. This happens every time I engage with Hiram—it happens to a lot of us when we engage with him—and I invariably promise myself, after taking orders from Hiram, that next time I'll stand up to him. Tiptoeing around Hiram's anger resolves nothing and only serves to perpetuate a strained and uneasy state of affairs in which one personality—Hiram's—overwhelmingly influences the general quality of feeling in the room as a whole. Would it be going too far to imagine that Hiram is himself responsible, in large part—unwittingly, presumably—for whatever uncomfortableness we brothers experience when we congregate? Might it be possible—if, in fact, Hiram is the root cause of our squabbles and disputes (it would make sense that the firstborn, Hiram, might faithfully embody the rages and pathologies of the preceding generation and, by extension, the generations before that, retreating backward in time)—might it be possible to drive a wedge through this ancient and pervasive *household trepidation*—I don't know what else to call it—by meeting Hiram's anger with anger? It was in this absurd spirit of revolt against destiny that I now hurled the flowers to the floor before Hiram's walker, and said, "Find a vase yourself, you sadist."

Instantly I regretted my actions.

Hiram leaned forward. He was little and bent over and liver-spotted and lame, and I was startled to realize once again that I was intensely afraid of him. Throwing the flowers was nothing more than an act of self-disempowerment, an emotional demonstration of the sort that Hiram would never allow himself.

The poor lilies, scattered across the floor, were broken; pallid white blooms had come apart on impact, and smears of pasty yellow pollen stained the rug in places. A few petals came to rest around the walker's legs and on the black toes of Hiram's wing tips. Suddenly I wanted to apologize to the flowers themselves, even to William, who had brought them. I felt awful when Hiram said: "Pick them up."

It was one of those familiar, deplorable moments. I wished for the dinner bell, but it wasn't yet time for ninety-nine men to rush from every corner of the room to grab plates and serving spoons and fight it out over the steam trays. In the meantime, there stood Denzil, and next to Denzil was Saul, and next to Saul, and more or less directly behind Hiram, were Aaron and Pierce; and of course there were other brothers standing around, looking on; and no one among these men wanted to get too close to a fight involving Hiram.

Hiram leaned forward over the walker, out over the metal frame. He had me in his sights. He said, "You're full of hate, aren't you, Doug?"

"No."

"You keep it all bottled up inside, your scorn and your contempt for people, and when you can't control it any longer, it

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comes flying out and we have one of our little tragic scenes. Isn't that right?"

"No."

"This is a family full of love, Doug. We all love one another here. This whole room is full of love. Too bad you can't feel it, Doug. You can't participate in love because you're busy tearing everybody down. You want to tear us down and you want to discredit our forefathers."

"That's not true."

"It's not enough for you to tear down the living. You have to go after the dead."

"No."

"Don't say no to me, boy. I've seen you in your same chair by the big window, night after night, rooting through the old books and papers. You think that if you find sickness in others you'll be healthy. You think if you find weakness in others you'll be strong. Does throwing a bunch of flowers at an old man make you feel strong, Doug?"

"No," I whispered.

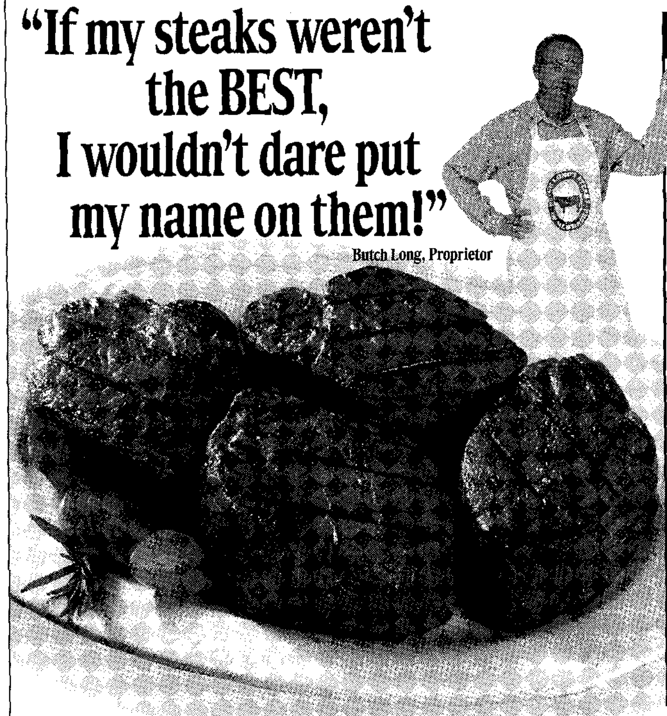
"Speak louder."

"No."

"Pick up the flowers, Doug."

One of the sad features of most close relationships is the decay of intimacy as a function of time, turmoil, and all the little misunderstandings that inevitably occur between people, leading them, year in and year out, toward the same tired conclusions: conversation falters; friendships fail. That said, allow me to concede that my brother Hiram is an incredible asshole. He finds your worst insecurities and then tortures you until you'll do practically anything to escape his voice's dry wheezing and the spectacle of bony fists clutching that walker. Hiram is ninety-three, his breathing is irregular, and his voice naturally shudders and cracks. It is fair to guess that he might have felt, that night with flowers at his feet and with a crowd of younger men gathered as observers, uneasy about his effectiveness as a figure of potency and strength. He needn't have.

"Take a look at yourself, Doug. Take an honest look at yourself standing there with your hair falling in your eyes. You really could do with a trim and a shave." He paused, coughed, inhaled one of his racking breaths. He resumed, "You need some new clothes. Those clothes you're wearing don't even fit you. Who wears a corduroy jacket anymore? You don't even stand straight, Doug. You slouch. You've



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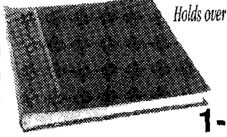

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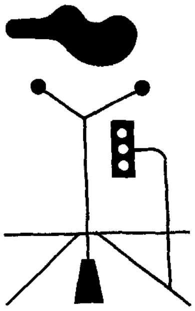
always slouched. You have the posture of a weak person."

Did I present such a sorrowful picture? It is true that I slouch a bit. I try not to hunch over, but I'm not getting any younger, and when I get up after a wintry night sitting in a straight-backed library chair, straining my eyes over water-stained property deeds, blurry date-of-death certificates, I'm bushed and I stoop. I don't think my hair is that bad. My hair is naturally fine and growing thin on top, it's a fact, and for this reason I leave it long on the sides—just below the ears. Don't get the wrong idea. I don't wear a comb-over. There is nothing more vulgar on a mature man than a comb-over. My clothes, I admit, are a few seasons out of date. So what? I've never followed fashion and I don't trust men—I'm thinking of the twins with their colorful, expensive matching sweaters—who heed the latest styles.

I said to Hiram, "The fact that I haven't shaved this week means nothing. I only want to help. I want everyone to get along. I want us all to be happy again."

How did this sound? I should explain that, in spite of our antipathy toward our eldest brother, we felt like children in his presence, children caught in the worst moments of growing up, the times of clear and terrifying appreciation of one's utter smallness in the world; and this smallness is excruciating to feel in adulthood. For this reason, and in spite of mean feelings—in spite of everything—we all craved our aged brother's esteem.



He heaved himself up and gasped another painful breath. It hurt to listen to him. "Comport yourself like a man. Take full responsibility for your pernicious thoughts and immoral behavior."

Hiram could have been referring to only one thing. Our brother Andrew, a sweet guy with a heart full of caring for the world's less fortunate, has lately been in the habit of passing the hat for donations to aid the itinerant people crowded in the open meadow beyond our high stone walls. You can see their fires out there, late at night. The hat is a well-worn homburg, gray felt with a narrow brim and a deep crown lined in dark material stained darker, long ago, by someone's hair oil. Into this receptacle go the bills and coins from our pockets.

Once in a while, the hat of money will rest on a table. Someone might set it down, and it might then be overlooked for an instant if something diverting is happening elsewhere, a quarrel breaking out or Gregory solemnly lighting one of his splendid cognac-drenched flaming desserts.

Let's just say for now that I know exactly the amount that I have borrowed—over time—from the hat, and that it is only just roughly less than eight hundred dollars.

"I've been short on cash lately! What's the big deal? I'm going to pay it back!" I cried at Hiram.

To underscore the point, and to further illustrate the essential humility of my character, I walked forward two steps and abruptly, dramatically, as if swooning, collapsed before Hiram's feet. I dropped to my hands and knees and reached out for those broken lilies. As I have already observed, several pale blooms had come to rest directly atop Hiram's large black wingtip shoes. This banal but evocative white-on-black symbolism was not lost on me as I plucked up one, then another and another ruined flower. Human beings in stressful relationships will frequently behave in ways that contradict or even reverse their own most certain expectations. The fact remained that I had, in a moment of pride, demolished a gift bouquet. I recollect this now not to defend my submission that night before Hiram but to articulate a postulate; once an authentic conflict reaches its climax, then time will seem suddenly interrupted and the adrenaline will flow in your blood and your head will feel hot and cold at the same moment, because you've got to choose the upright thing to do. I believe that the patriarchal succession leaves in its wake a readable trail—clues to the formation of character and personality—as generation after generation adapts to the pain and suffering of family life.

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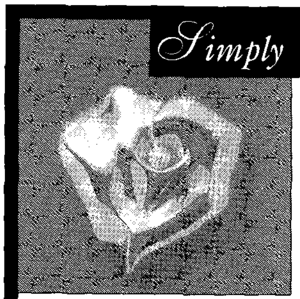

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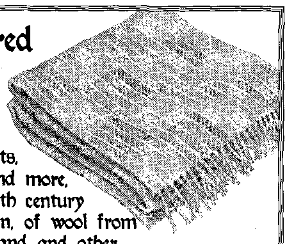

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on the black river that snakes through the mountains to the west.

After that, there were no more Dougs for a while. In 1854, one materializes among the rolls of a preparatory academy run by a Scotsman who believed in the godliness of child labor and freezing baths. Need I say more? In the decades that followed, the name Doug became identified with an array of superstitions and death anxieties.

This brings me to the situation as it stood that night in the red library with Hiram and those flowers. How could I, a fully grown Doug descended from a worthy line in which previous Dougs were squandered so beautifully before their primes, forgo this chance to establish a magnificent and honorable behavioral precedent, a fine example for all my brothers and for any Doug who might one day thrill to call me his ancestor? I do not consider my prostration before Hiram a surrender. Not in the least. Kneeling down for flowers was a triumphal revelation of willingness to quit a meaningless standoff in favor of community and concord. It felt good to get on the floor.

The carpet was obscenely dirty. Who was responsible for vacuuming? I looked underneath claw-footed chairs and saw dust balls, ripped papers, desiccated food particles and cigarette butts, matches burnt black, and many gray heaps that must've been ashes surreptitiously dumped. The carpet itself was gritty to the touch; the weave felt suffused with sand and dirt, and the rancid smell that rose from it was of something wet and dead. How many after-dinner ports had been absently tipped and allowed to dribble into sugary pools that fed the bugs and soaked through these old threads, down into the foam matting and between cracks dividing floorboards that groaned beneath our shoes and boots all stomping this way and that, to the bathroom, the porno cabinet, the drinks table?

Hiram's stockings were checkered and sheer. One had slid down its leg. There was not much leg there. The skin was chalky alabaster, speckled brown. Hiram's trousers rode high on him. He belted them at the bottom of his rib cage. If you look around the world, you'll notice elderly men wearing pants in this fashion. Hiram's were green and a mismatch with his socks. The shoes, as I have said, were black, and they were massive. They held my attention. I should say that they held me under their spell. I reached out to take a flower that lay across a shoe's toe. As if responding, the shoe moved toward my hand. Of course, this was only Hiram shifting his foot. But it seemed to me, down there on my belly on the reeking carpet, as though this fat black wing tip had become self-activated, that it had decided, all by itself, to proffer its white bloom. Obviously, Hiram's wing tip was not alive. I knew this. It's just that the shoe looked so *big* up close, and so oblong, so impressively thick-skinned, with its laces like whiskers and its toe that glistened like an animal's wet nose.

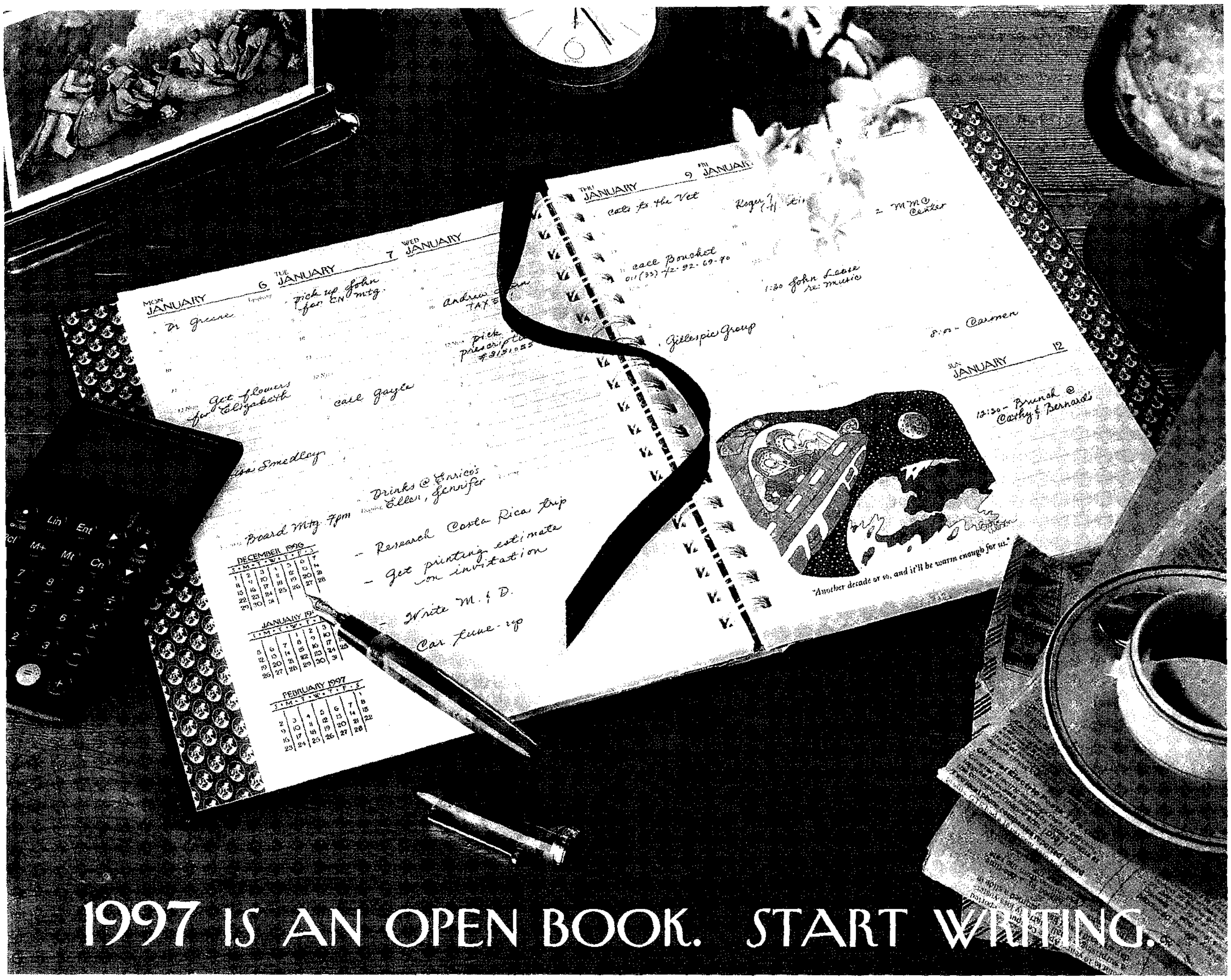
I wanted to pet it.

Perhaps if I caressed the shoe I might like myself better. I have found it calming, from time to time, to make a small gesture expressing abjection, and to really get in touch with feelings of loneliness and shame.

I crawled toward the shoe. It was Hiram's right shoe, not the left. It rested beside its mate inside the open metal cage formed by the walker's tubular framework. The shoe was a foot away from me. I was flat on my stomach. One dozen broken lilies were in my hands. These flowers were barely more than denuded stems. The stems were bent and their fallen petals lay scattered across the carpet. I inched forward. I suppose you could say I was sneaking up on Hiram's shoe. I dragged myself along; I stayed low; I tracked my quarry. The carpet's rank musk smelled delicious. I breathed in the smell. The shoe waited. It seemed to regard me. Tiny impressions punched into the uppers made lacy, delicate arabesques, heavenly swirls in the black leather.

Such thick soles.

I crawled closer—near enough to kiss the shoe almost. My breath fogged its shine. Light dust showed on its toe. Suddenly, Hiram's foot inside the shoe moved, and I feared for an instant that I had charged too close too fast and would frighten the shoe away. But the shoe stayed put. Its movement was slight—only Hiram stretching, redistributing his weight, getting comfortable. Naturally, Hiram's slightly moving foot caused the shoe's uppers to stretch and expand (much in the manner of a languid animal's leathery back, whenever the animal shifts its weight or stretches after a nap), and this movement, the shoe's breathy



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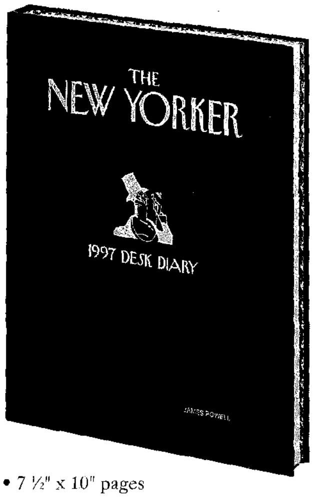

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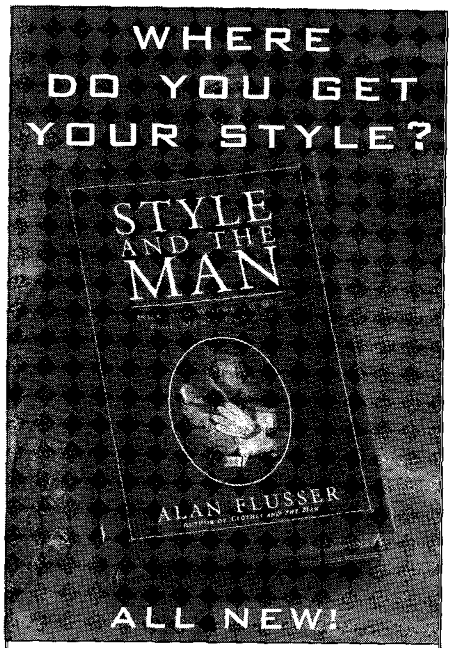
dilation, seemed to me so absolutely lifelike—and, of course, it was; Hiram's old foot was alive and kicking, as they say—so adorable and beguiling, so downright friendly, that I began to feel warm all over. I felt happy. I felt, in my happiness, able to do what I had crawled across the unclean floor to do: I dropped the lilies, reached out, and stroked, with my hand, Hiram's wing tip.

It seemed to like this. I gave it a squeeze. I felt Hiram's foot buried inside. The foot made subtle nuzzling motions, as if responding to my touch. And with each soft nuzzle from the shoe, I felt an accompanying wave—these were physical sensations that originated deep in my stomach—of pleasure. Miniature waves of pleasure feathered out along my arms and legs, and I noticed in myself a capacity for deeper breathing; each exhalation of rotten air became a gentle evacuation of the stresses and strains of life. How relaxing it was to lie down on the floor. In my right hand was Hiram's black shoe. Here were Hiram's trouser legs, and here were the walker's slender posts. Lily petals resembled water flowers drifting across the dark and tranquil rug. Cigarette ashes rose up beside chair legs; the ash piles looked to me like volcanoes. Convoys of brothers' feet passed in every direction. I could see every type of footwear—loafers and canvas sneakers, lace-up oxfords and water-resistant work boots, expensive running shoes and cowboy and riding boots and moccasins and floppy bedroom slippers, sandals worn with socks, you name it—dozens of shoes stamping to and fro; and I could feel, as I lay breathing deeply on our threadbare carpet, the mingled repercussions of everyone's steps, the mild shock waves echoing through the floor and the rug.

What a sweet feeling. It was a vibrating massage. I breathed out, let myself go slack, and considered, for the moment, my brother Max.

Max was still on his back; his nose no longer bled; he seemed looser in the body. Evidently, the floorboards were helping him to unwind.

I gave another firm squeeze to Hiram's wing tip, then crept closer and snuggled. Gently, I rested my cheek on the shoe's cold toe. The shoe felt so comfortable to lie on. Its smell of leather and pungent black polish gave me a memory that I could not place—the inexplicit



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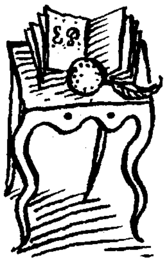
memory of a feeling that was like sadness, though not exactly sadness. Certain feelings lie in wait for certain sounds or scents to activate them. Everyone knows the power of the senses. Deep memories of feelings describe the earliest manifestations of the self. Pillowed by Hiram's shoe, smelling its leather, I felt transported back to a time too distant to accurately recollect. I felt with real conviction that I was alone in the world, that my brothers were not gathered around me, that no people were outside in the meadow beyond our garden wall. I imagined our garden full of green trees and youthful, blooming plants. The rose garden, in particular, appeared, in my mind, splendid with color. I suppose it was Hiram's shoes themselves, and his shoe polish with its fertile, earthy smell, that provoked these images of red flowers, crawling vines, branches swaying in a breeze.



"Doug."

My eyes were closed. I did not want to open them.

"Doug."

A draft coming in the window made me cold and I shivered. The floor felt cold.

"Doug. Look at me. Doug," the voice said. I felt a hand touch my shoulder, and I looked up and saw that it was Spooner leaning over me, gazing down toward me. His face wore a troubled expression. He spoke into my ear. "Let go of Hiram's foot."

"Spooner, it's you. Thank God. Give me a drink, man. Please, give me a drink."

Then Hiram's shoe kicked and squirmed. I held on, but the shoe kicked my face, and Hiram exclaimed, "Get him off me! He's a dangerous person!"

"Hang on a minute, Hiram," Spooner said, and saying this he knelt on the floor beside me; he reached out, closed his hand around my wrist, and began gently tugging me away. "Doug, you can't be grabbing people's feet. It's not right."

"Give me a drink, Spooner. Come on, man. I know you've got some on you."

"I don't know if that's a good idea, Doug." He gave my wrist a yank, but I was holding on tight. "You know what happens when you drink," he said, straining hard against me.

"Nothing's going to happen. I just want a taste."

"That's what you always say, Doug."

"I mean it."

He seemed to consider this. "If I give you a taste, will you let go of Hiram's foot?"

"Yes."

"Promise?"

"Yes."

He stopped tugging. He released my hand and reached into his inside coat pocket. That's where he carries his handsome pewter flask filled with cognac. I felt so happy when I saw Spooner's flask. He keeps this with him at all times. It is as if the flask were a part of the man. It wears a cork stopper secured inside a glass cap appended from a delicate silver hinge. It holds a half pint. It's antique.

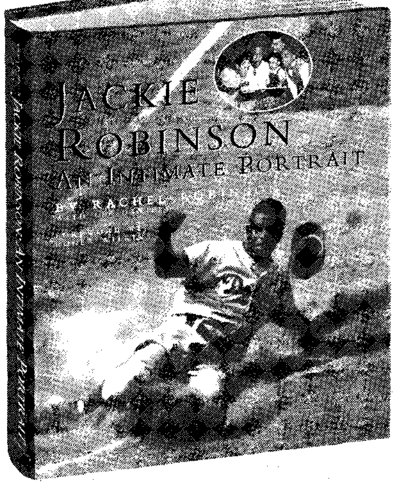
"Pull him off me! Hurry up, down there! *I want my dinner!*" Hiram's voice commanded. I was aware now of other brothers looking on, clean shirt collars and shaved faces luminous beneath dim chandelier light. I could make out Pierce and Jacob, Allan and Ralph, Nick and Saul.

"Just a taste, Doug," Spooner said.

"Only a taste," I agreed. My face where Hiram's shoe had kicked me felt sore. I had numbness and tingling around one eye. I heard a voice in the crowd explaining the situation to someone: "He's locked on to Hiram's foot. He won't let go." And another voice said, "He got hold of me like that once. I was wearing hiking shoes. Doug got tangled up in the laces and I couldn't shake him. It was terrible." This second voice went on to report other details. I did not pay strict attention. The pewter flask had made its appearance from Spooner's coat and Spooner was unscrewing its glass top and pulling the cork all in one artful motion. Would it be going too far to say that this was what I had been waiting for since nightfall? To nurse from my brother's flask—here was a happiness in life! I took the metal spout in my mouth and sucked hard at it, the way a young calf sucks, to feel safe in his world and warm inside himself, and to become strong.

I got a fair swallow, considering the size of the spout, and was therefore pleased with myself.

"Pick him up, gentlemen," Spooner said to those standing closest, and I felt arms around me and men's hands clasping my arms, and then the spout went away as I was hoisted from the rug. A bell was ringing in the distance. It was the dinner bell. ♦



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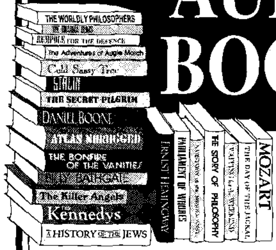

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BOOKS

THE FIRST AND THE LAST

Lenin revealed, and buried by Gorbachev.

BY DAVID REMNICK

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV was in town recently to promote his latest book, "Memoirs" (Doubleday; $35), and while his publisher does not anticipate that he will make the best-seller lists, the last General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union travelled in the style to which he has become accustomed. Gorbachev toured in a private plane and was accompanied by an entourage that included security guards; his personal doctor; a translator; his wife, Raisa; her personal assistant; and a chief of staff. There was dinner at La Réserve, lunch at Coco Pazzo Teatro, and applause everywhere. "Abroad is hell," Nancy Mitford once wrote. The opposite is the case for Gorbachev: abroad, he escapes the outsized hatred of his countrymen; abroad, he is celebrated and is at peace.

I met with Gorbachev at his hotel, the Waldorf-Astoria, and mentioned that in addition to reading his book I'd just finished "The Unknown Lenin" (Yale; $27.50), a compilation of telegrams, letters, and directives which had been kept in secret archives until now. The papers feature Lenin at his worst: murderous, conspiratorial, contemptuous of all his closest colleagues in the revolution. Lenin is constantly demanding the execution of opponents ("the more the better") and the swiftest deportation of writers and editors considered contrarian. The volume is part of Yale's remarkable archival series Annals of Communism, and is edited by Richard Pipes, a Harvard professor emeritus of history and a member of Ronald Reagan's National Security Council.

"You say it's edited by Pipes?" Gorbachev said, with a knowing smile. "Ah, well, no doubt Mr. Pipes selected just the right documents to make Lenin look terrible. He is not a great friend of Lenin's. Or of mine, I suppose."

Although most Russians insist that Gorbachev is utterly irrelevant today, his opinion of Lenin cannot but fascinate, for the two figures bracket the twentieth century. Gorbachev was Lenin's heir and, as it turned out, his destroyer. As General Secretary, Gorbachev made ritual obeisance to Lenin—he could not do otherwise—but at the Waldorf he offered no apologies for the Bolshevik founder. Pipes may have come up with some secret documents, he conceded, but over the years Russian writers like Vladimir Soloukhin and the late Venedikt Yerofeyev also compiled "greatest hits" collections that emphasized what Gorbachev called, without hesitation or euphemism, "Lenin's great cruelty."

"I can only say that cruelty was the main problem with Lenin," Gorbachev added. "Had the Russians continued along the path of the February revolution, had they continued on a path of political pluralism, it would have been a different situation. Russia at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was developing quite dynamically, and had they gone on that way it would have been much better."

What a remarkable admission! Here was a man who had struggled for and finally inherited the top position in the Party admitting that, yes, Russia would have been better off had those two signposts of his life and beliefs—the October revolution and Lenin himself—never existed. Instead, Russia might have flourished if the leaders of the decidedly bourgeois February revolution had been strong enough to ward off the Bolsheviks and develop more or less in synch with the democratic, capitalist West. Clearly, this is a position recently adopted by Gorbachev: had he voiced it during his ascent up the Party hierarchy, he would surely have been asked to "resign for reasons of health" and been given a broom, the better to clean nuclear-waste dumps.

"There came a time when the rulers and the landowners and the royal court were not able to sustain Russia, and there was a collapse, and so this ruthless power, the Bolsheviks, took charge," Gorbachev went on. "The main mistake of the Bolsheviks was that their violent emergency measures and methods were not temporary at all but were instituted for decades. The rather artificial model created by Marx, which was made even more utopian by what the Bolsheviks added to it—that model was imposed by force, and that model did violence to the human being, to the human conscience, to his beliefs, his initiative, his economic sense. It was diktat, all of it! The Bolsheviks and Stalin were able to industrialize the country. Fine. But was there only one way of doing this? No! We have the record of other countries, who industrialized themselves, too, but with ground rules and democracy. In Russia, it was all bloody experiments."

OVER a long career, Richard Pipes has been criticized for being tendentious and blind to the virtues—or, at least, the complexities—of Soviet history. Many Western academics on the left, as well as Gorbachev himself, have argued that Lenin was a far more complicated figure than the diabolical revolutionary described by Pipes in his magisterial two-volume history of the Bolsheviks, "The Russian Revolution" (1990) and "Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime" (1994). Pipes has been faulted for his censorious tone and for being too quick to lump Bolshevism together with German and Italian Fascism. He, in turn, has wondered why one should become faint-hearted when confronting a revolution characterized by unprecedented cruelty, dictatorial rule, and a legacy of tens of millions of victims. Although it is surely interesting to know that Hitler gave a fine speech and built the Autobahn, Pipes might ask, did such details change the essential character of the regime?

In "The Unknown Lenin" Pipes assembles a hundred and thirteen documents, none of which appeared in any of the five editions of the collected works of Lenin that were published under Soviet rule. One can readily see why the Soviet censors kept these documents hidden. They explode various long-held Bolshevik myths: here is evidence that Lenin was a hereditary noble; that he

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Lenin in Red Square, May 1, 1919. Documents reveal the ugly cast of his mind and his language—his ruthlessness.

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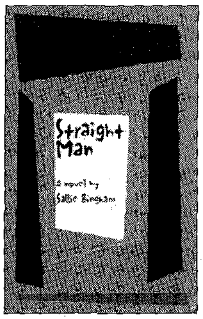

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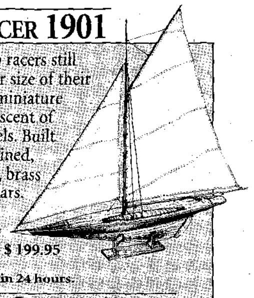

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accepted German money for the revolution; that the Allied invasion of Murmansk was executed with his encouragement, to stave off a German-Finnish invasion; that he devised the tactic of imprisoning enemies in mental institutions; that, though he was long believed to be a master strategist of global politics, he thought that revolution in Germany and England was imminent. Above all, the documents reveal the ugly cast of his mind and his language—his ruthlessness. Here he is in a letter from 1918, instructing three Bolshevik leaders to take action against peasants resistant to the revolution:

> Comrades! The uprising of the five kulak districts should be mercilessly suppressed. The interests of the entire revolution require this, because now "the last decisive battle" with the kulaks is underway everywhere. One must give an example.
>
> 1. Hang (hang without fail, so the people see) no fewer than one hundred known kulaks, rich men, bloodsuckers.
> 2. Publish their names.
> 3. Take from them all the grain.
> 4. Designate hostages—as per yesterday's telegram.
>
> Do it in such a way that for hundreds of versts around, the people will see, tremble, know, shout: they are strangling and will strangle to death the bloodsucker kulaks.
>
> Telegraph receipt and implementation.
>
> Yours,
> Lenin.

At various points, Lenin declared himself ready to slaughter Cossacks, to "treat the Jews and urban inhabitants in the Ukraine with an iron rod," to organize smear campaigns in the press aimed at discrediting a delegation of British trade unionists "as social traitors, Mensheviks, accomplices of English colonial plunder, and so on." Lenin is at his most brutal, perhaps, when he concerns himself with the Russian Orthodox Church. In 1922, he intensified his campaign to crush organized religion (and the Church's hold on the peasantry); he also intended to loot as many churches as possible, to finance the Bolsheviks and "war communism." Lenin demanded to know on a daily basis how many priests had been executed during the campaign. In "The Unknown Lenin" Pipes publishes a letter from Lenin to the Politburo which was smuggled out of the Central Party Archive in the late sixties and published in Paris in the émigré journal *Herald of the Christian Movement*. For decades, Moscow officials had always lied about its authenticity:

> For us this moment is not only exceptionally favorable but generally the only moment when we can, with ninety-nine out of a hundred chances of total success, smash the enemy and secure for ourselves *an indispensable* position for many decades to come. It is precisely now and only now, when in the starving regions people are eating human flesh, and hundreds if not thou*sands of corpses are littering* the roads, that we can (and therefore must) carry out the confiscation of church valuables with the most savage and merciless energy, not stop*ping [short of] crushing any resistance*. . . .
>
> We must, come what may, carry out the confiscation of church valuables in the most decisive and rapid manner, so as to secure *for ourselves a fund of several hundred million* gold rubles. . . .
>
> One wise writer on matters of statecraft [Machiavelli, "The Prince," chapter eight] rightly *said that if it is necessary* to resort to certain brutalities for the sake of realizing a certain political goal, they must be carried out in the most energetic fashion and in the briefest time because the masses will not tolerate prolonged application of brutality. . . .
>
> Therefore, I come to the categorical conclusion that precisely at this moment we must give battle to the Black Hundred clergy in the most decisive and merciless manner and crush its resistance with such brutality that it will not forget it for decades to come.

Lenin's siege mentality did not ease even with the end of the civil war. He continued to send more and more intellectuals into exile, to crush and outlaw even whispers of opposition. And he was never quite satisfied with the degree of order he had established. "What sort of dictatorship have we got anyway?" he said. "Show me! It's a bowl of mush and not a dictatorship!"

One 1922 directive, which Lenin issued just months away from being rendered inactive by strokes and less than two years before his death, demanded the suppression of an uprising led by the Church in the textile town of Shuia: "The greater the number of representatives of the reactionary clergy and reactionary bourgeoisie we succeed in executing . . . the better," he wrote. The result was the execution of an estimated eight thousand priests and laymen.

Dmitri Volkogonov, a Soviet Army general and military ideologist, who during the glasnost period was given the task of helping to "open history," writes in his biography of Lenin, "It is difficult to fathom how a man who loved Beethoven and Spinoza, who had read Kant and who liked to tell Gorky and Lunacharsky how much the Bolsheviks valued the intelligentsia, could reconcile himself to a system permeated with police rule. How could Lenin, who claimed to be the leader of a new world, personally write the orders to hang, to shoot, to take hostages, to imprison in concentration camps, knowing that these would not remain mere words?"

It is true that toward the end of his life Lenin endorsed the New Economic Policy and other relatively permissive economic measures, as a tactic to stabilize Bolshevik rule. But after reading "The Unknown Lenin" one would have to be delusional to think that Lenin had transformed himself and his point of view so greatly that Stalinism was an aberration. His strategy insured that the Party would control the state, and the man in the best position to control the Party was Joseph Stalin.

In his dotage, Lenin recognized that there would be no world revolution and that the task of the Communists would be centered on a prolonged consolidation of power inside the Soviet Union. His last essays, "On Coöperation," "Better Less But Better," and "Our Revolution," even questioned the dogmatism of his ideology and practice. But this was a change of tactics, not of character. Maxim Gorky once said that for Lenin individual human beings held "almost no interest," and this remained true to the end.

GORBACHEV has always seemed to reject the "continuity thesis" that dominated Western Sovietology for decades: the idea that Stalin was a natural, and even an inevitable, extension of Lenin. Trotsky and others on the anti-Stalinist left argued that Stalin had "betrayed" Lenin and the ideals of the revolution, but after the Second World War a consensus evolved in Soviet studies that Stalin was Lenin incarnate. The surprisingly diverse members of that consensus included Hannah Arendt, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Samuel Huntington, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Robert Conquest, Michael Karpovich, Adam Ulam, Milovan Djilas, and James Burnham, and even, on the left, two historians distinctly sympathetic to the revolution, E. H. Carr and Isaac Deutscher. Stalin's colossal brutality, his paranoia, was steeped in Leninist precedent, they argued.

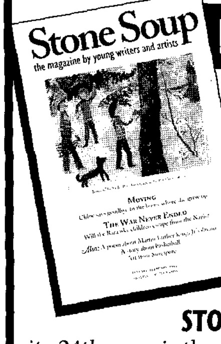
After all, Lenin developed the first concentration camps, launched the assaults on the clergy, the peasantry, and the intelligentsia, dispersed the Constituent Assembly, banned rival parties and factions within the Communist Party, and never dropped the paranoid language of the underground. Lenin may have criticized Stalin personally and recommended a new Party leader, but he had also been deeply critical of his other Bolshevik colleagues and had made sure that Stalin was the only Bolshevik who was a member of all three ruling branches of the Party's Central Committee: "Out of the totalitarian embryo would come totalitarianism full-blown," Merle Fainsod wrote in his influential text, "How Russia Is Ruled."

In the aftermath of the sixties, a wave of revisionist scholars, like Moshe Lewin, Robert C. Tucker, David Joravsky, J. Arch Getty, Sheila Fitzpatrick, and Stephen Cohen, argued that the continuity thesis was fuelled by the animus of the Cold War and was too programmatic: Why not just claim that Stalin derived from Ivan the Terrible? The revisionists argued that history always indicates alternatives, and had a ruler other than Stalin succeeded Lenin things might have turned out differently. What if Bukharin or someone else had prevailed, and employed the kinder, gentler policy that Lenin set out in his last essays? In a sense, the most important revisionists were not in the American academy but, rather, in the Politburo: Khrushchev put a wedge between Lenin and the "crimes" of Stalinism with his famous "secret" speech of 1956, and Gorbachev rehabilitated Bukharin in 1988 and fought for a "socialism with a human face" influenced by the Prague Spring.

Pipes cannot abide such speculation. In the concluding pages of his history of Bolshevism he writes:

> Every ingredient of what has come to be known as Stalinism save one—murdering fellow Communists—he had learned from Lenin, and that includes the two actions for which he is most severely condemned: collectivization and mass terror. Stalin's megalomania, his vindictiveness, his morbid paranoia, and other odious personal qualities should not obscure the fact that his ideology and modus operandi were Lenin's. A man of meager education, he had no other source of ideas.
>
> In theory, one can conceive a Trotsky, Bukharin, or Zinoviev grasping the torch from the dying Lenin and leading the Soviet Union in a different direction than Stalin. What one cannot conceive is *how* they could have been in a position to do so, given the realities of the power structure at the time of Lenin's illness.

Gorbachev, for his part, still cannot bring himself to endorse the continuity



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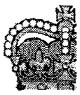

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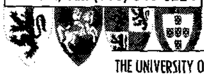

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thesis, but he does admit that it is folly to speculate too much on the "what if"s of the Bolshevik century. "Yes, Stalin's initial impulse was taken from Lenin," he told me, "but, even though Lenin's final writings criticize the final years, those letters and works were rejected by Stalin and not even read for thirty years. Stalin used Lenin's other writings in his struggle to defeat Bukharin. But we don't know what would have happened had Lenin lived longer. History is history. Lenin died. He did what he did."

IT does not require the excessive determinism of psychobiography to believe that the reason Gorbachev could finally come to such a cool assessment of Soviet history is that he and his family saw so much of it. Gorbachev was born in the age of Stalin and grew up in the farming regions near the southern Russian city of Stavropol. Although Gorbachev's hefty book is prone to the customary sins of a statesman's memoirs—self-justification, an unwillingness to credit colleagues, an abject bitterness toward all that comes after him—it is nevertheless extraordinary, if only for its depiction of his years before coming to power. Gorbachev does not romanticize village life or his childhood: "From a present-day point of view people lived in wretched poverty." In his grandfather's modest house, Gorbachev discovered the usual mélange of religion and revolution. There were books and pamphlets by Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, "while the other corner of the room was adorned by an icon with an icon-lamp," he writes. "Grandmother was deeply religious. Under the icon, on a little homemade table, stood portraits of Lenin and Stalin." In fact, Gorbachev told me, a schoolboy essay he'd written on the virtues of Stalin was considered so ardent and exemplary that "for years thereafter other children were made to read it."

From a Machiavellian point of view, the best sections of Gorbachev's book are the episodes that describe his uncanny ability to ingratiate himself with mentors. Although he was very much of that strange world of the Party élite, he was able to preserve at least enough ironic distance to see the absurdity of it. He recalls how, as a Politburo member, he was shocked to learn that it was unacceptable to visit another member socially. Andropov, his greatest mentor, told him that such a visit would create "loose talk" and Brezhnev would know about it immediately.

From a purely human point of view, however, the most telling sections are about the landscape of his youth: the relatives who starved to death, the devastation of the war, and the haunting memory of how both his grandfathers were arrested during the purges. Gorbachev's maternal grandfather, Pantelei Gopkalo, was charged with being a member of a "counter-revolutionary right-wing Trotskyist organization"—a typical (and fraudulent) charge in the thirties. "I remember how after Grandfather's arrest our neighbors began shunning our house as if it were plague-stricken," Gorbachev writes. "Only at night would some close relative venture to drop by. Even the boys from the neighborhood avoided me. Now I understand that one cannot blame them: anyone who maintained contact or simply associated with the family of an 'enemy of the people' was also subject to arrest. All of this was a great shock to me and has remained engraved in my memory ever since." Perhaps the most traumatic moment came when Pantelei returned home from prison and recounted the interrogation to his family:

> Trying to get him to confess, the investigator blinded him with a glaring lamp, beat him unmercifully, broke his arms by squeezing them in the door. When these "standard" tortures proved futile, they invented a new one: they put a wet sheepskin coat on him and sat him on a hot stove. . . .
>
> Pantelei Yefimovich recounted all this just once—that very evening. Nobody ever heard him speak about it afterwards. He was convinced that Stalin did not know about the misdeeds of the NKVD and he never blamed the Soviet regime for his misfortunes. Grandfather did not live long.

Gorbachev's other grandfather, Andrei Gorbachev, was arrested for the sin of not having fulfilled a sowing plan and was sent to a work camp in Siberia for two years. As it happens, Gorbachev's grandfathers could count themselves relatively lucky. They survived their imprisonment. Raisa Gorbachev's family was less fortunate. Her grandfather Pyotr Parada was arrested for "counter-revolutionary agitation" and was executed.

Despite their persecution, the members of Gorbachev's family were true believers, veterans of the Great Patriotic War, and above all loyal to the revolution and the state. At one point in our conversation at the Waldorf, I asked Gorbachev if he ever thought that by undercutting the Party and the Union he had betrayed the ideals of his family.

"I don't think I betrayed them," he said. "I think that what we tried to do through reform was to make the economy work for the human being, to make society more democratic and normal. This is exactly what our people needed. My grandfathers were both persecuted—one sent to exile, the other tortured and saved only by a miracle—and I believe that what I did was what they would have wanted. I tried to create conditions for a normal life and normal relations between human beings."

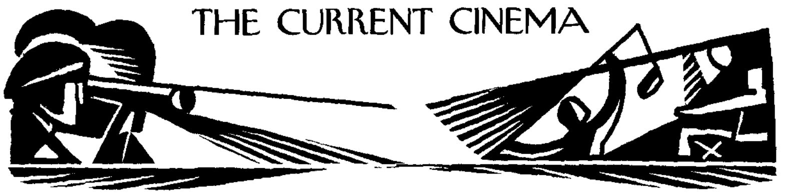
A brave urge to bestow normalcy on a country corrupted by a grotesque and cruel system is Gorbachev's leading virtue. By trying to reform that system, Gorbachev destroyed it. With almost no violence at all, he helped end decades of confrontation with the West and began to bring his country into the world. When events outpaced his intentions, he never resorted to the tactics of Lenin to contain them. There were many mistakes—even some violence—but there was never an execution, or a Chechnya, to bloody his record.

Gorbachev is in many ways a dark and lonely man. He can scarcely hide his resentment of the way that Boris Yeltsin shoved him aside in 1991, and he takes a certain pleasure in denouncing every mistake of the current government. Yeltsin still manages to strike back at his old antagonist: with every passing year, he takes away one more privilege from the deposed President. Gorbachev's office space is cut back, thanks to government decrees.

But abroad Gorbachev unwinds, earns money, reaps applause. At a dinner party in New York thrown by Doubleday, he was in the middle of a toast to his American hosts when, suddenly, Raisa interrupted, saying, "Mikhail Sergeyevich! Look at us here! Can you imagine any other Soviet leader doing this? Imagine Chernenko at dinner with American friends in New York!"

Gorbachev laughed long and hard. He, more than anyone, knew how absurd an image it was. "Yes, and it seems so normal," he said.

Having made such an image so normal sets him apart forever from Lenin, the man whom his Party had asked him to revere and to embody. ♦



THE CURRENT CINEMA

MAD LOVE

An erotic-metaphysical fantasy, and a restored surrealist classic.

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

THE dwindling audience for foreign films hasn't had much to get excited about in the past few years, but, if the buzz surrounding Lars von Trier's "Breaking the Waves" (which won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes and was enthusiastically received at the New York Film Festival) is any indication, jaded art-house patrons may once again have a film to call their own. "Breaking the Waves" tells the sad story of a young woman named Bess (Emily Watson) who lives in a bleak Scottish coastal village: a tight little community whose mores derive from the exceptionally severe brand of Protestantism practiced at the local church. Bess is as devout as the next girl, but slightly more independent-minded than most. In the movie's opening scenes, she declares her intention to marry a man of the sort that the village elders frown on: her beloved is not one of the local prigs but a handsome, lusty, good-humored Scandinavian oil-rig worker named Jan (Stellan Skarsgård). Having consummated their union in the lavatory during the raucous wedding, the newlyweds enjoy a brief and very un-Calvinist erotic idyll before Jan has to leave his bride and go back to the offshore rig. Missing him acutely, Bess prays for his speedy return, and God grants her wish, in the capricious, perverse way that's de rigueur for dramatic deities: Jan suffers a terrible accident on the job, and comes home paralyzed, near death. As this first act unfolds, viewers with long memories may begin to suspect that von Trier, a wily postmodernist, has rediscovered some magic, forgotten formula for art-house success. If "Breaking the Waves" becomes a hit, von Trier will have proved that the American audience for foreign films wants today precisely what it wanted in the boom years of the fifties and the early sixties: nudity plus theology.

Fairy-tale miracle: Lars von Trier's "Breaking the Waves."

NIKKI SIMMS

In bygone days, sex alone was often enough to stimulate the highbrows—European movies were routinely praised for their superior "frankness"—but religion (usually in the form of anguished appeals to an absent God) could lift an otherwise ordinary erotic melodrama to the next level of titillation. A Bardot vehicle was a guilty pleasure, a one-night stand; the metaphysical touch applied by, say, Bergman or Resnais enabled viewers to prolong the experience—to relive it through analysis. (I'm speaking, of course, about effects rather than intentions: the sexually charged spirituality of the great Bergman pictures, for example, clearly reflects the paradoxes of the filmmaker's unique nature, and not a canny commercial sense.) It's tempting to attribute the decline of the European film to the increase, over the years, in the erotic explicitness of American movies—bare flesh just isn't the novelty it used to be. Lars von Trier (who is Danish) is the first European director in quite a while who has recognized the aphrodisiac

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properties of religious imagery. "Breaking the Waves" transforms sweet, simple Bess into a saintly whore (Mary Magdalene is invoked) and then martyrs her. Von Trier, with breathtaking low cunning, mixes Christian parable and masochistic fantasy. Spiritual and physical uplift are virtually indistinguishable here: they look pretty much the same in the dark.

The plot turn that sets poor Bess on the steep road to her carnal Calvary is her paralyzed husband's request that she take lovers and then describe her encounters to him: he argues that she'll really be making love to *him*, and that these vicarious pleasures will help keep him alive. Initially, she resists, but as Jan's condition becomes graver she becomes more desperate, and decides to give his unorthodox plan a whirl. She first attempts to seduce a sympathetic young doctor (played by Adrian Rawlins), who chivalrously rejects her; finally, she takes to the streets, picking up men on buses and in bars, and boarding ships to service clients that even experienced hookers consider too dangerous. She looks pathetic and uncomfortable in her tart's getup (big earrings, red leather hot pants, patterned stockings, and high heels); her upright family and neighbors are beginning to whisper that she's leading a sinful life; and she obviously hates what she's doing. But she carries on with her risky, joyless activities, because they work: every time her husband takes a turn for the worse, Bess rushes off to screw someone, and Jan recovers. At a certain point, the heroine realizes that she no longer has to *tell* Jan about her lovemaking in order for it to have the desired therapeutic effect, and the movie turns utterly berserk, trading its only mildly witty conceit—the notion of Bess as a North Country Scheherazade—for a brazen cosmic whopper. What's keeping Jan alive, it seems, isn't Bess's dirty bedtime stories but her pure, self-sacrificing love, her willingness to debase herself in order to save him.

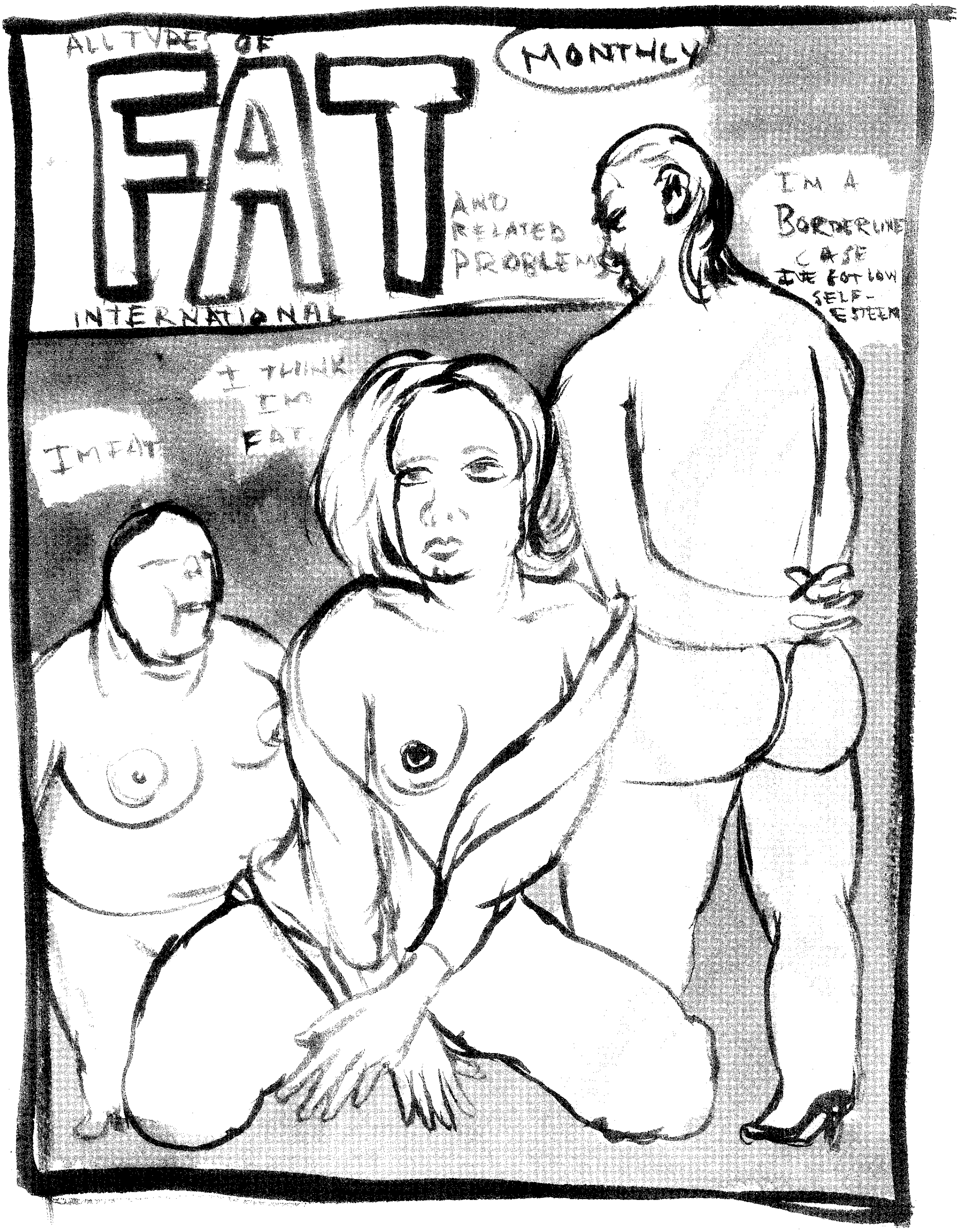
"Breaking the Waves" leaves little doubt that anything other than divine cause and effect is operating here. In several scenes, Bess talks with God, and we actually hear His end of the conversation: her voice deepens as she channels the quips and bons mots of the Almighty. (The quality of His dialogue suggests that Heaven isn't rich in writing talent.) Whether Bess is imagining God's presence or not, she's clearly tapping into some sort of higher power: her faith—if nothing else—moves mountains. In the end, the heroine, cast out by the stern community (children throw stones at her as she passes in the street) and abused by sadistic johns, gives her life for the man she loves. Jan survives, and even—miraculously—rises from his hospital bed and begins to walk.

The erotic-metaphysical hokum of "Breaking the Waves" would be somewhat easier to take if the picture displayed anything resembling a genuine spiritual impulse. The few true religious filmmakers—Bergman, Bresson, Kieślowski, and von Trier's countryman Carl Dreyer—all stubbornly refuse to explain the inexplicable: in their movies, mysteries remain mysteries, and linger beyond the final fadeout. What von Trier offers in "Breaking the Waves" is just a fairy-tale miracle, a casual wave of the wand, and the gruelling details can't disguise his essential frivolity. Like a magic trick, the movie is carefully rigged to produce an illusion. The handheld camera, bobbing and weaving restlessly in every scene (except for a handful of landscape tableaux that illustrate chapter headings), gives the picture a busy, spontaneous-looking surface that seems designed to distract us from the schematic storytelling. And nothing is permitted to interfere with our belief in the virtue of the heroine and the hero. Bess would be far more complex emotionally—more interesting as a character—if the movie suggested that she might be enjoying her sexual encounters, even a little bit. And von Trier finesses the viewer's qualms about Jan's voyeuristic life-support strategy by the clever expedient of setting the action in the early seventies—that is, in a time before the AIDS epidemic. (The other major effect of the period setting is to equip "Breaking the Waves" with one of the worst soundtracks in the history of movies: von Trier subjects us to, among other horrors, Jethro Tull, T. Rex, Thin Lizzy, Deep Purple, and Procul Harum.)

When, after two and a half hours of ponderous sleight of hand, the trick is finally achieved, it hardly seems worth the effort: a female Christ figure, conjured out of perilously thin air. On close examination, the heroine of "Breaking the Waves" doesn't look like much. Part pinup girl and part religious icon, she's been constructed to evoke two of the easiest responses a movie can elicit from an audience: she turns us on and she jerks our tears. Are foreign-film viewers really desperate enough to mistake this for high art? Jesus wept.

IN any event, metaphysical enigmas and perverse eroticism are, by a happy coincidence, currently available in the purest form imaginable—in Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 romantic thriller "Vertigo," whose infinitely suggestive sights and sounds have been refurbished by the ace film-restoration team of Robert A. Harris and James C. Katz. There's no additional footage in the fresh 70-mm. prints that Harris and Katz have made, but in the case of "Vertigo" the increased clarity of Hitchcock's images and Bernard Herrmann's soaring music is more than enough to release new meanings, surprising resonances. Previous prints—even those struck for the movie's 1984 theatrical re-release—were dark, muddy, and blue-tinted, obscuring those details of color and action which simultaneously illuminate the characters and deepen the mystery at the heart of the story. In the most perceptive contemporary review of the movie, the Cuban critic (later novelist) Guillermo Cabrera Infante praised "Vertigo" as "the first great surrealist film," and, while "first" is debatable, "surrealist" is not. And surrealist works, like the dreams they imitate, derive their unsettling power from the lucidity with which they portray impossible, irrational events: the more clearly we see, the stranger things look—and the more fully we surrender to what can't be understood. That's the sort of lucidity that Harris and Katz have restored to "Vertigo."

The plot of the film (the screenplay, by Alec Coppel and Samuel Taylor, is based on a novel by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac) is nothing special; like countless other thrillers, it depends for its suspense on an elaborate structure of deception, misdirection, and disguise. The hero, John (Scotty) Ferguson, played by James Stewart, is a San Francisco police detective forced to retire on account of his acute acrophobia: a condition that, as we see in the picture's opening scene, once rendered him helpless to prevent a fellow-officer's death. His guilty, aimless retirement—his occupation, he says, is "wandering"—is interrupted by a request from an old college friend, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), that he tail another wanderer: Elster's beautiful young wife, Madeleine (Kim Novak). Scotty's assignment requires of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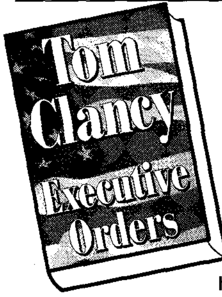
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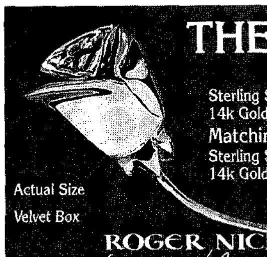
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him only the most apparently straightforward kind of detection—basic surveillance, the simple act of following someone at a discreet distance. The working hypothesis, which the investigation initially appears to confirm, is that Madeleine is emotionally disturbed; Scotty concludes that she's obsessed with the short, tragic life of an ancestor named Carlotta Valdes—perhaps, he fears, to the point of *believing* herself destined to die as Carlotta did, by her own hand. And Scotty, too, becomes obsessed: the act of following Madeleine, who seems as lost and haunted as he is, turns into an intense romantic fixation, and the distance between them ceases to be discreet.

Nothing, of course, is as it appears; in thrillers, intimations of the supernatural invariably prove to be red herrings, and madness, in the end, usually turns out to be method. What's extraordinary about Hitchcock's treatment of the shell-game plot of "Vertigo" is that even when the mystery is "solved" it isn't over. Scotty loses Madeleine, then finds her again, and then, in the picture's shattering conclusion, loses her for a second time; and we realize, finally, that in the course of the film the straight line of the hero's surveillance has been gradually, imperceptibly, inexorably curving, until it has described a perfect circle, which is the true shape of romantic obsession. Scotty's passion is repetitive, static, self-consuming; the detective can't see that he's chasing his own tail. (When the recognition comes, it is—in the film's most frequently uttered phrase—"too late.") In retrospect—and, where "Vertigo" is concerned, retrospection is everything—the film's key image is the one that most strongly evokes the oneiric consciousness of surrealism: Madeleine's black-gloved hand points to the concentric rings in the trunk of a felled redwood while, in voice-over, she intones, "Somewhere in here I was born, and there I died." Thanks to Harris and Katz, that image, like every other in the movie, is sharper than ever, and, now that the lines are no longer blurred, Hitchcock's design becomes achingly clear. "Vertigo" isn't so much a mystery story as a story about a mystery—the mystery of why the ardent lovers, Scotty and Madeleine, are doomed to pursue each other endlessly, to run in circles until they can't run anymore. There's no solution to that. The real, and terrifying, end of this investigation is a diagram of the cruel geometry of desire. ◆

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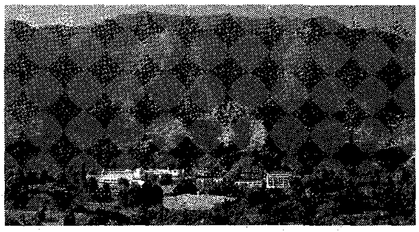
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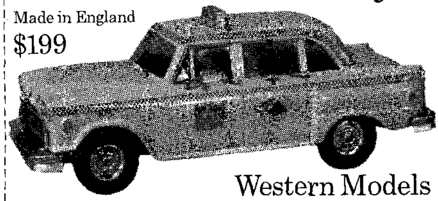
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MUSICAL EVENTS

REFUSING SEDUCTION

A new "Carmen" at the Met.

BY PAUL GRIFFITHS

THE strong moment in Waltraud Meier's performance as Carmen, in the Met's new production of Bizet's opera, comes in her response to Don José's "Flower Song": her "*Non*" is cold, bleak, and irredeemable, and its finality is maintained through the monotone phrases that follow. Ms. Meier is very good at saying no. She isn't so wonderful at saying yes, and the lack of passionate, headlong affirmation in her performance robs her of any possibility of giving us Carmen, however excellently, for much of the time, she sings the notes.

Waltraud Meier and Plácido Domingo are Carmen and Don José in Bizet's opera.

Her excellence, indeed, may be part of the problem. Carmen isn't excellent. The role isn't written in such a way that a judicious, musicianly, and even thoroughly expressive performance will be sufficient to construct the character. The music doesn't give the singer answers so much as questions, driving at how she herself understands sensuality. Any complete interpretation of the part must therefore be self-exposure to an unusual, perhaps unmatched degree—a degree where performance becomes an erotic act with the audience. This could be why, any time we see the opera, Carmen's interest in Don José has to be so puzzlingly hard to accept: José, we're thereby told, is only an empty vessel in which we place ourselves, and we do so whatever our sexual identities and inclinations, for Carmen's carnality isn't exclusively female or restrictedly heterosexual. At the Met, though, the carnality just isn't there. Ms. Meier—and no one can blame her—is unable to take off her psychological clothes in order to entertain liaisons with four thousand people at once. Hence, no Carmen.

The fact that this same singer conveys so well the seductress in another opera—Kundry, in "Parsifal"—might tell us something about the differences between the two works, which Nietzsche so resolutely contrasted. Kundry's attempts on Parsifal are not only very much longer and unsuccessful; they also develop as dialogue, placing us, the audience, in the condition of spectators. Perhaps even more important, Kundry's voice is the human location for an orchestral miasma, and this unvoiced music is what really is at work in unmanning Parsifal and seducing us. The case is very different with Carmen. Her voice is the agent. She's a singer. Kundry has no showstoppers, Carmen half a dozen. Kundry, who hardly exists as a character, demands only the extraordinary vocal prowess Ms. Meier has at her disposal. Carmen wants less, and more.

One could read signs in Ms. Meier's singing—her coolness of tone through a remarkable range of vocal colors, her short phrases, often abruptly ended, and her decisiveness ("O.K., so the note's a touch flat; I'm sticking with it")—that she wants to discover a Carmen who isn't constantly

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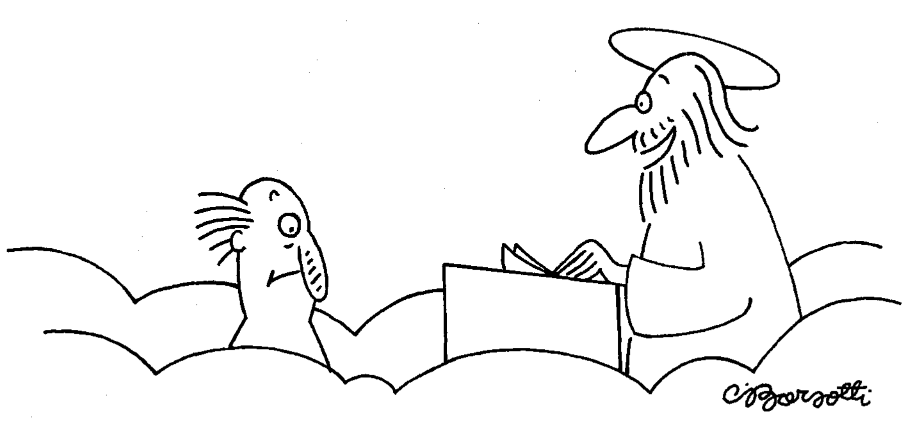

"No, no, it was a heart attack. The air bag worked like a charm."

• •

in heat. The trouble is that there's no other Carmen to be found, and Ms. Meier's denial of allure sometimes conjures what I'd hardly have thought possible in this opera: an alternately tart and skittish, governessy figure damned to go through the motions of portraying a vamp. In the last act, you have the impression that the crimson mantilla she's wearing belongs to someone else.

The central role isn't the only one miscast. Sergei Leiferkus's covered tone, correctness, and grounded stance don't allow him to get near Escamillo; the toreador as a proper gentleman is rather a woeful sight. Plácido Domingo as Don José has, in contrast, all the right ideas and, of course, all the right experience, but there are parts of the role—notably the "Flower Song"—where the sturdiness of his present vocal means won't allow him to negotiate every corner: a couple of phrases in head voice on opening night had to be taken as touching memories of his younger times.

The evening has one vocal treasure. Wandering into the third act—and, by the frankness and humility of her bearing, mutely accusing the absurd pretense at an immense rock gully in which she is fated to appear—comes the Micaëla of Angela Gheorghiu, who sings her monologue with a gorgeous and superbly managed quick-vibrato lustre, and spins it in long phrases that sometimes almost disappear into the infinity of silence. Singing, she tells us, is not about putting something out but about drawing someone in. She is intimate, and entrancing. On a lighter level, there's also much joy to be had in the performances of Mary Dunleavy, Kristine Jepson, Kim Josephson, and Tony Stevenson as the quartet of Carmen's sidekicks. The effect they give of recklessness, so refreshing in this otherwise bloated and cautious production, depends on skill and wit; they show what a funny opera "Carmen" can be.

They're helped by the quick speeds James Levine is happy to take, as if acknowledging that, if languor is out of the question, at least there can be zest. Others onstage have more difficulty with his tempos—especially the chorus, whose music can be sung this fast only by people who can pronounce the words with ease. (Language problems afflict the principals less, though nobody in the cast is French.) Mr. Levine, leaving the unrambunctious smugglers and citizens to fend as best they may, knows that he can trust his orchestra, and his main interest seems to be in the vitality, clarity, and beauty of the accompaniment in what is a traditional text. Extraordinary things are revealed. A fugato passage, toward the end of the first act, has the mismatching harmonies and officiousness of Stravinsky's neoclassicism; the flute-and-harp prelude to the third act is a poised piece of salon music that has somehow strayed into the mountains. But orchestrally, as vocally, this isn't a sexy "Carmen."

Nor is it so scenically, as I've already implied. Directed and designed (as far as the sets are concerned) by Franco Zeffirelli, this isn't so much a Met production of "Carmen" as a Met production of the Met production of "Carmen." Everything in which the house specializes where spectacle is concerned—massiveness, sets filling the whole rectangle of the stage opening, quaint not-quite-

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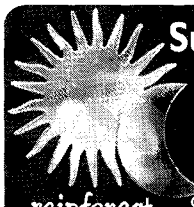

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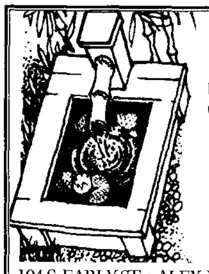

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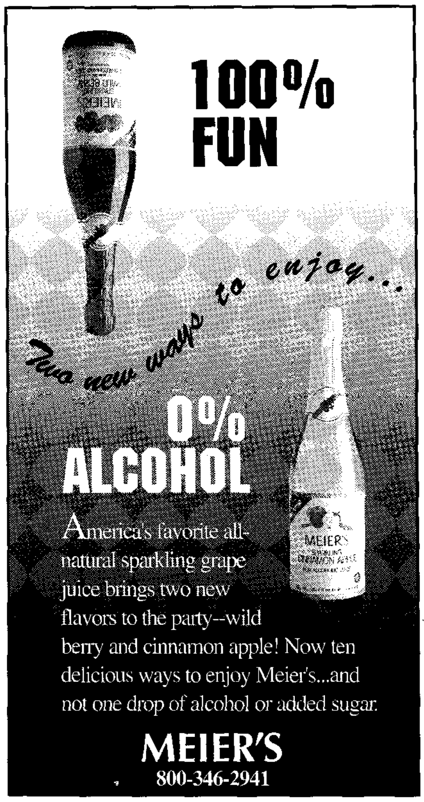
verisimilitude in the buildings, the boulders, and the painted backdrops, busy crowd scenes with lots of bit parts, groupings strongly focussed on the star singers, who are forever tailed by their follow spots—is provided in an abundance reaching toward caricature. The effect is to make it unimpeachably clear where we are: not in and near Seville, and certainly not in some miracle world contrived by music, but at the Met. A strange homespun hanging, garishly colored, is lit at the start of each act with images that offer clues to the action about to ensue: bigness and obviousness are there at the beginning, and nothing will take them away—except the quietness of Ms. Gheorghiu's singing and the humor of the four accomplices.

There's a sense in which "Carmen" undoubtedly is about putting on a show. Bizet must have recognized that the Spanish setting offered opportunities for stage display as well as for borrowing the musical equivocations of beat and mode that put the flame in flamenco. Also, a large part of his opera is performance within the performance, from the trooping of the boy soldiers in the first act (including a lot of surprisingly blond young Sevillians in this production) to the procession of matadors in the last, by way of the songs in dance rhythm that Carmen sings. In her case, though, the frame is not doubled but broken, which allows, or at least intensifies, the dangerous naturalness. Where the others sing because they're in an opera, Carmen would be singing exactly the same music, we might imagine, in a production of the piece as a play. She'd be singing exactly the same music, we might imagine, in real life.

But at the Met Ms. Meier's singing keeps reality always behind a glass pane, and Mr. Zeffirelli's production disdains to have anything to do with it. On with the populace, on with the horses, on with the little priest to give his benediction, on with the wretched folkloric dancers! (In Madrid the other day, I saw a group of eight or ten peasants from León taking part in a street demonstration; their dance, little more than a severe stepping from foot to foot, and their song, little more than a guttural mumble, had more violence and more passion than anything to be seen at the Met.) There's a great deal happening in this staging, a great deal to distract us. What we don't see is "Carmen." ♦



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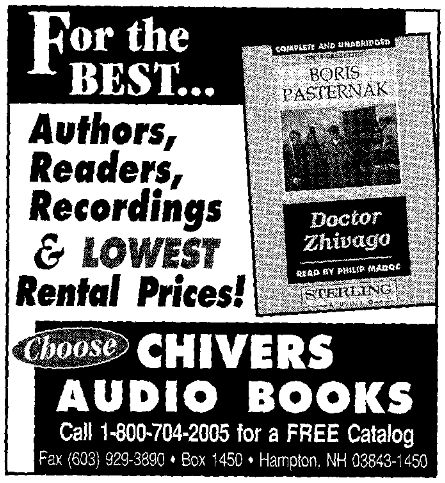
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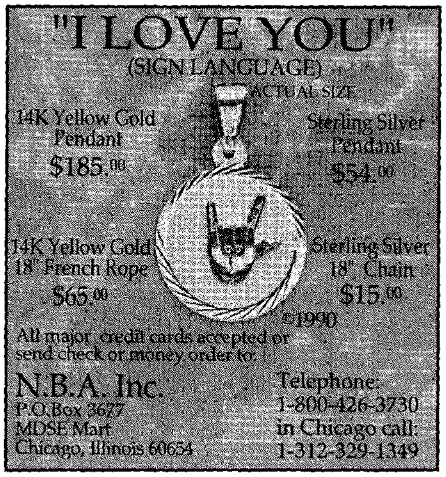
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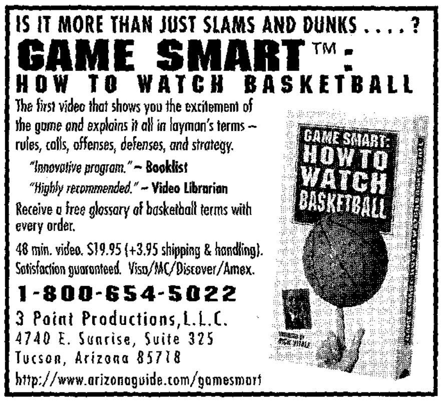
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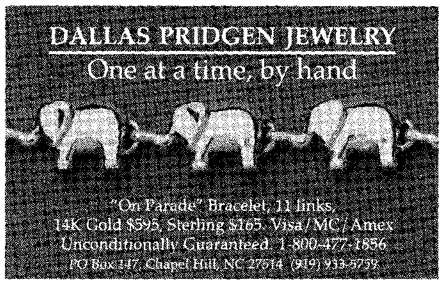
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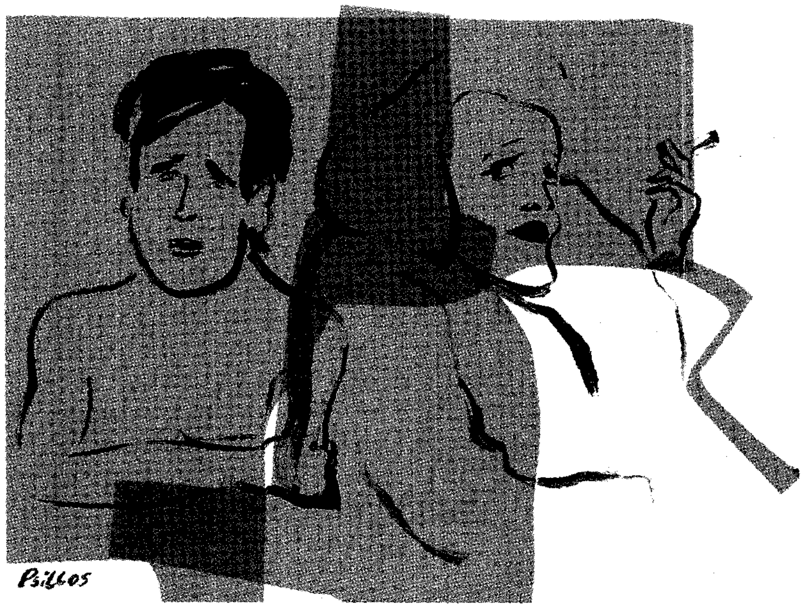
LILLY DEAREST

A true story about Lillian Hellman that doesn't ring true.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

THERE'S more than one way to skin a monster. You can do what Mary Louise Wilson does in "Full Gallop," her brilliant one-woman show about Diana Vreeland, in which she carefully and imaginatively peels back the flamboyant behavioral layer of her subject to suggest an emotional life that few knew existed. Or you can do what Peter Feibleman does in "Cakewalk," his play about his twenty-year relationship with Lillian Hellman, in which he exploits bad behavior for its obvious comic and pathetic value. What he's done isn't character assassination; it's more like character strip-mining.

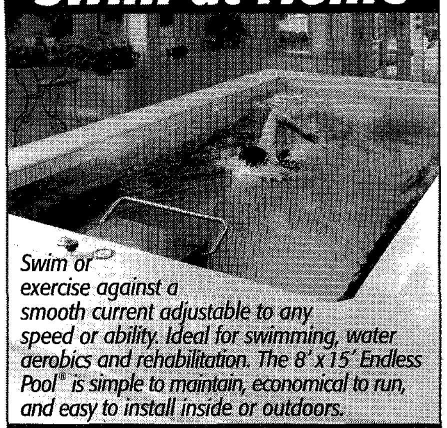


Symbiotic relationship: Michael Knight and Linda Lavin as Feibleman and Hellman, the pilot fish and the shark.

"Cakewalk," based on Feibleman's memoir, "Lilly," which was published in 1988, four years after Hellman's death, has been through the mill since it was first presented, three years ago, at Cambridge's American Repertory Theatre. The version now playing at the Variety Arts has been substantially rewritten and cut from two and a half hours to one and a half. Recently, just before the production came to New York from Winston-Salem, Mike Nichols unofficially took over the direction from Marshall W. Mason. And yet whatever tweaking was done, the play comes across as if nobody had paid attention to its words—what they said and what they didn't say. Feibleman doesn't stint on incident—the fighting, the sex, Hellman's failing health, his own inconstancy and his struggles as a writer—but the scenes, individually and collectively, are strangely without emotional impact. Things happen to Lilly and Cuff—a nickname she gave Feibleman, from "Leaves of Grass"—but not much seems to be happening inside them. It's a problem both of the material and of the casting. Elaine Stritch played the role of Lilly in the A.R.T.'s production (which John Lahr reviewed); I didn't see it, but my guess is that Stritch put some wrinkles in the role to convey the toll that the ravages of time, alcohol, cigarettes, and ambition (professional and sexual) had taken. Here Lilly is played by Linda Lavin, who—though she chain-smokes her way through the show—seems almost too healthy for the role. Oddly, in a couple of instances when she's wearing a fur coat (meant to jog the audience's memory of Hellman's "What becomes a legend most?" Blackglama ad), Lavin does seem to have hit on the right combination of toughness and vulnerability, but that may be because a woman of a certain age wearing a mink coat radiates both anger and sadness, as though it were a consolation prize for all the things she wanted in life and *didn't* get. Lavin fires off some good ones, which you would expect—Hellman had quite a mouth on her. It's the basic conception of the role that's the problem. Feibleman has written Hellman as a sort of two-dimensional, Potemkin character, which only reinforces the image of her as a boilerplate celebrity intellectual.

Cuff, too, is problematic, and not just because the age difference between him and Lilly—twenty-five years—was, and still is, something of an eyebrow-raiser. Feibleman first met Hellman when he was ten, at a party that his parents gave for her in New Orleans; their entanglement began in 1963, when he was twenty-eight, and the play's action begins when Cuff arrives for a visit at her house on Martha's Vineyard in the summer of that year. (Judging from the pictures in Feibleman's book, the house looked lived-in and inviting. Its rendering in this production is stark, coldly lit, and forbidding: you'd think this was a place that writers were exiled to.) From the first, Cuff (played by Michael Knight, a star of "All My Children") appears to have the self-knowledge you would expect in a character that isn't just based on the author but *is* the author, and was conceived with the benefit of hindsight. But he's more knowing than knowledgeable—someone who is all too aware of his charm. He frequently addresses the audience to explain himself—to confess, really—and in an early scene he tells us, "Of all the tasks I'm no good at, the one that scares me most is to feel the presence of someone in the world as that person meant to be felt, and to remember. To say without sentimentality I have been witness to this separate person, this passage on the planet, to say she was here, and this is what she was like, take her or leave her." His desire to be such a witness is commendable, as is his confession of his limitations in the face of such a task. But Feibleman wears his honesty as if it were a medal for bravery (taking his cue from La Hellman), and he seems to think that displaying it amounts to a theatrical experience. He has a story to tell, but he doesn't have the distance that would enable him to shape it properly. How could he? Hellman named him her principal heir; she left him her house on the Vineyard, "some cash," and half her royalties—"enough to live on modestly for the rest of my life," he says in "Lilly." (We should all live so modestly.) A couple of paragraphs later, he writes, "I had forgotten how nice having money is and I thought about it a lot after the will was settled: for two or three months I thought about money more than I thought about Lillian. That's how shallow I am." You can read such passages in Feibleman's book and immediately see the tantalizing possibilities of his story—the varying levels of manipulation, deception, and self-serving unseemliness—in the hands of someone who had the creative tools for getting to those hard-to-reach places where the truth lies. By sticking to the facts as he saw them, by equating mere honesty with truth, Feibleman has written himself—and Hellman—into a very small dramatic corner. As every fiction writer and every good biographer knows, if you want to tell the truth about someone you have to make it up.

EVEN before I saw the three young clowns who call themselves The New Bozena, at the Cherry Lane, they had made me laugh. Advertisements for the show had been plastered all over town, and above pictures of the goofy faces of the three guys were come-ons like "IF YOU LIKE PUTTING LOBSTERS IN YOUR PANTS, YOU'LL *LOVE* THE NEW BOZENA" and "CLOWNS WITH THE LOOK AND FEEL OF QUALITY LEATHER." But their act isn't smart-alecky. David Costabile, Kevin Isola, and Michael Dahlen—all alums of N.Y.U.'s graduate acting program—convey childlike innocence. One of them faces the world with quivering timidity, one is gape-mouthed and a little slow, and one has a catlike curiosity—although a cat probably wouldn't try out a staple gun on its tongue. The show was a little long, and some of the sketches didn't work, but it's the first time since "Fool Moon" that I've cried from laughing so hard. Watching these three was like watching babies trying to figure out how the world works, and it was hilarious in a way that brought out a feeling of protectiveness in me. I wanted to do to them what one of them did to the unhappy critic sitting in front of me: kiss them on the tops of their cute little heads. ♦



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TEST YOUR POST-ELECTION I.Q.

BY BRUCE McCALL

1. TRUE OR FALSE:
   - a) Bill Clinton plans to register as a Democrat in 1997.
   - b) Bob Dole plans to speak of himself in the fourth person.
   - c) Dick Morris plans to consult for the Tontons Macoutes.

2. Complete the following sentence: "Bill Clinton never met ___________ he didn't like."
   - a) an Indonesian
   - b) a Hollywood airhead
   - c) a hot-fudge sundae

3. The key issue of the 1996 Presidential election was:
   - a) Ralph Nader's inexplicable failure to seize the loose-railings safety issue;
   - b) Bob Dole's hobby gap;
   - c) Madonna's baby's name;
   - d) Staying awake.

TEST TIP # 1: USE TWO MATCHSTICKS TO PROP YOUR EYELIDS OPEN.

4. Bob Dole galvanized the Republican Convention by:
   - a) Arriving two hours late;
   - b) Challenging President Clinton to also blow up fifty soccer balls;
   - c) Telling the audience to "smoke 'em if you got 'em."

5. The 1996 Republican National Convention was held in (*check one*):
   - ☐ San Simeon
   - ☐ San Marino
   - ☐ San Andreas

6. Ross Perot blamed his defeat on:
   - a) Gridlock at the chart shop;
   - b) A NAFTA-backed plot to inject Mexican peyote into our drinking water;
   - c) Being born with a head that looks exactly like a turnip.

7. Elizabeth Dole is *not* related to:
   - a) G. Gordon Liddy;
   - b) Libby Holman;
   - c) Lizzie Borden;
   - d) Women's Lib.

8. President Clinton's whistle-stop railway campaign through the Midwest was notable for:
   - a) No derailments;
   - b) On-time schedule;
   - c) On-time derailments.

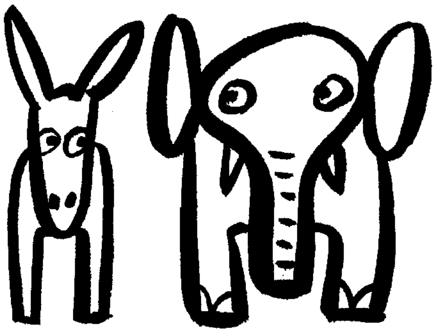
TEST TIP #2: SLEEPINESS CAN BE FENDED OFF BY SLAPPING YOURSELF ABOUT THE FACE WITH AN OPEN PALM.

9. Bob Dole resigned from the U.S. Senate in order to become:
   - a) Just a man;
   - b) Just a man from Kansas;
   - c) A man, a plan, a canal, Panama.

10. Phil Gramm is to Lamar Alexander as Steve Forbes is to:
    - a) Harold Stassen;
    - b) Governor William Scranton;
    - c) Amnesia.

11. Answer Yes or Yes Indeed:

    The Gore-Kemp Vice-Presidential debate drew lowest-ever TV ratings because it ran opposite PBS's "Nova: The Big Bands Search for the Lost City of Ubar, Hosted by Louis Rukeyser" (R).



12. Bob Dole's major campaign gaffe was:
    - a) Promising the Secretary of Commerce post in a Dole Administration to Archer Daniels Midland Company;
    - b) Calling for a fifty-per-cent funding cut for the Bridge to the Twenty-first Century;
    - c) Leaving Russell, Kansas.

13. In thirty seconds, arrange the following word clusters into their natural groupings:

    New Hampshire Primaries/catatonia/Iowa caucuses/Zombification/"I'm a Dole Man"/Spastic colon.

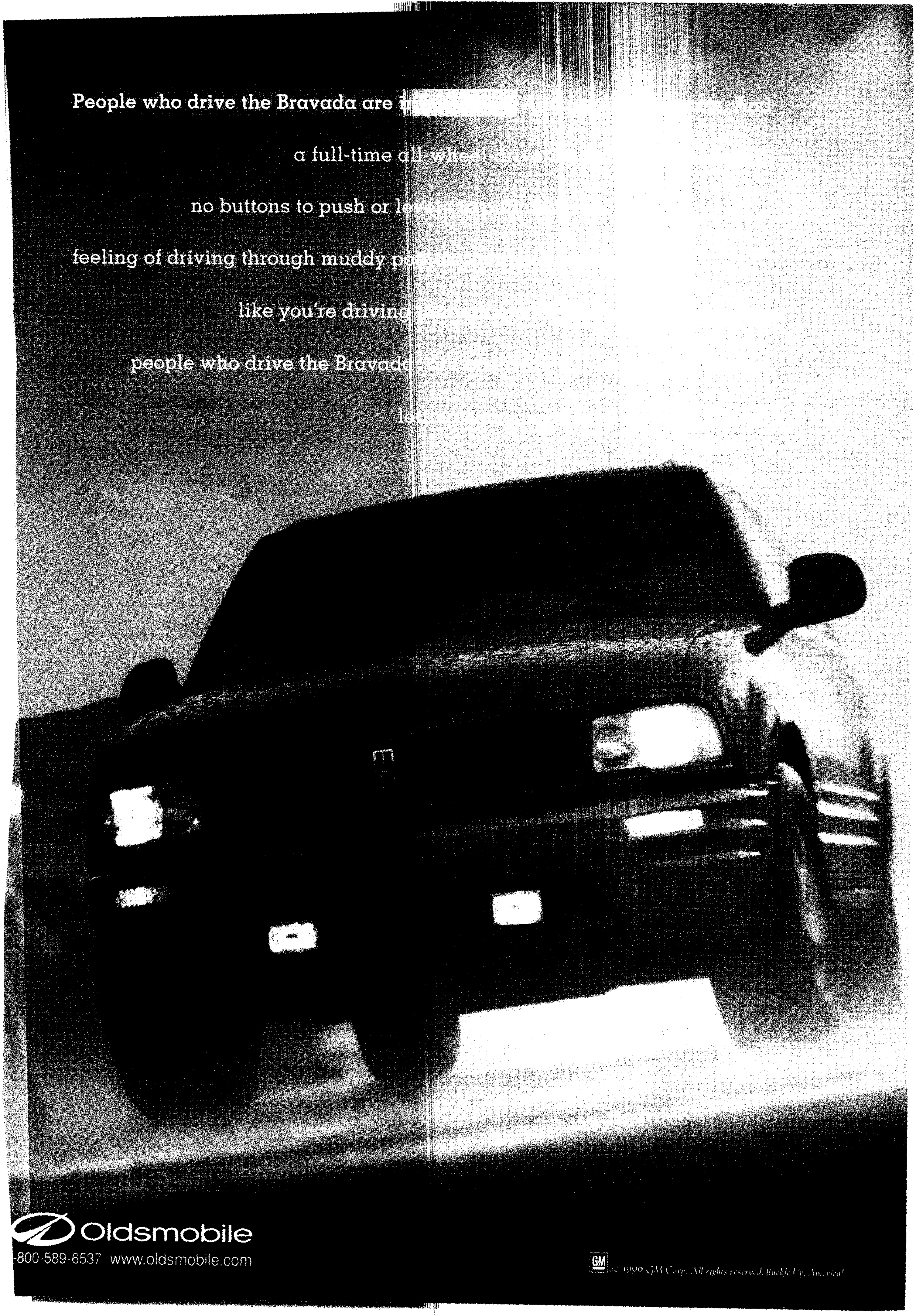
TEST TIP #3: HAVE A FRIEND OR LOVED ONE SPLASH A BUCKET OF COLD WATER ON YOUR HEAD. NOW!

14. President Clinton's first official act in his second term will be to (*check one*):
    - ☐ Finish his haircut on the runway at LAX;
    - ☐ Re-fire the White House travel-office staff;
    - ☐ Hang Mapplethorpe photos in the Oval Office.

15. The key Clinton foreign-policy concern during the campaign was:
    - a) Mexican or Chinese takeout;
    - b) German or American beer;
    - c) Getting good Cuban cigars for the victory bash without having to beg Arnold Schwarzenegger.

16. (*Optional*) Can you remember who you voted for in the Presidential election?

Quiz ends here. The person with the most correct answers (and five million Indonesian rupiah) will be appointed Ambassador to Luxembourg. Quiz ends here. Hello? Can you hear this? Quiz ends here. Wake up! ♦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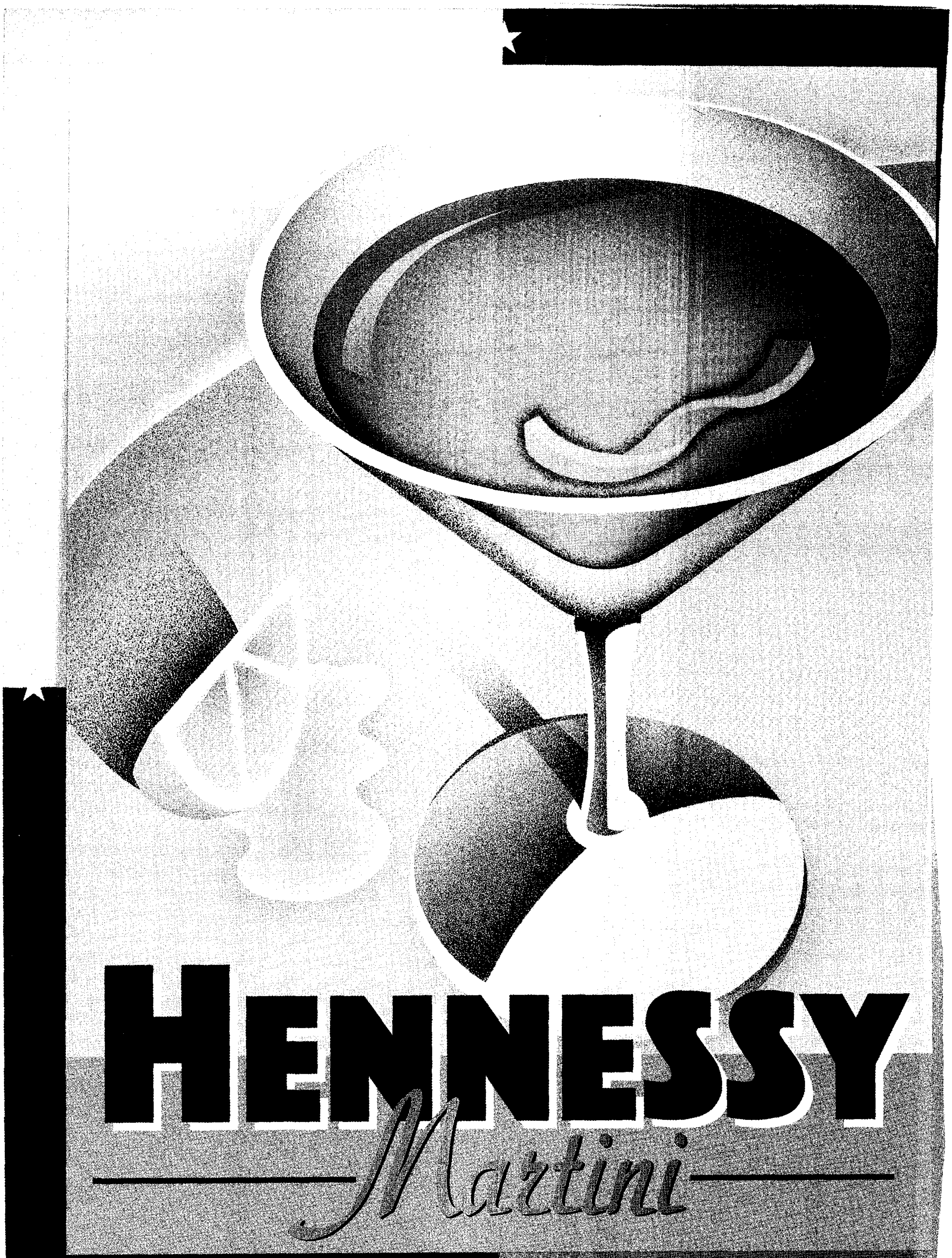
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